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INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

The advent of modernity in the seventeenth century ushered in new ways of understanding emotions that still shape contemporary debates. With the rise of modern science, reason was stripped of anything relating to values and emotions. This development required a concomitant reformulation of emotions, which increasingly were understood as non-rational urges that swept across the body. In the wake of this transformation two dominating ways of conceptualizing the emotions crystallized: one strand that considered emotions to be cognitive, involving judgment or conceptualization, in contrast to another one where emotions were understood as bodily sensations. If the former tradition had its roots in Aristotle, the latter view was first articulated in the work of René Descartes (1596–1650) and later developed further by Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677). Versions of this claim were also taken up by British empiricism, for example in the work of David Hume (1711–1776), and by nineteenth century positivism. In contemporary scholarship, both of these positions have advocates. The most well known proponent of the cognitivist view is perhaps the American philosopher and classicist Martha Nussbaum, who explicitly draws on the writings of Aristotle. However, what typically characterizes the contemporary turn to affect, according to American intellectual historian Ruth Leys, is its adherence to the modern understanding of emotions, a position labelled »anti-intentionalism« by Leys.
It consists of a) a radical separation between affect and cognition, and b) a flipping of the traditional hierarchy between mind and body, reason and affect, where affect and the body are considered prior to mind and reason. This view is evident in the influential work of philosopher and media theorist Brian Massumi, author of the seminal article »The autonomy of affects« (1995), where affect is described as independent of cognition. For Massumi and his followers the term »affect« denotes less a separate object of study than an ontological position that lays a foundation for rethinking fundamental concepts and distinctions in philosophy, such as the subject, the body, the world, politics, reason, representation, and the dichotomy between humans and other animals, to name but a few.

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

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

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

Two articles in this issue, both from scholars in gender studies and both based on interviews, take up the theme of emotions, gender, sexuality, and intimacy in late modern society. Combining two research projects on men’s and women’s friendships respectively, Klara Goedecke and Linn Alenius Wallin analyse friendship in contemporary Sweden. The authors highlight friendship as increasingly important in our times and develop novel feminist ways to question power relations, vulnerabilities and exclusions within such relationships. Catherine Vulliamy’s article focuses on stories of the lived experience of love, sexuality, and fluid subjectivities in
India today. Analysing the contradictory nature of the experiences shared with her, she investigates the extent to which love carries transformative potential and whether love itself can be transformed.

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

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

Johanna Sjöstedt,
September 2016

ENDNOTES


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

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


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

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


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

9 Jaggar: »Love and knowledge«.
11 Jaggar: »Love and knowledge«.
20 Vulliamy: »Contradiction and radical hope«, 75.
Kasper Kristensen, »What Can an Affect Do? Notes on the Spinozist-Deleuzean Account«

ABSTRACT

The role of cognition and the thought-determining power of affects has been a subject of lively debate within current affect theory. In this article I focus on a recent critique put forth by Leys and Zerilli, according to which scholars, e.g. Massumi, inspired by the Spinozist-Deleuzean understanding of affect arrive at such a strong dichotomy between cognitive judgment and affects that it leads to affective determinism. Arguing that there is a considerable gap between Massumi’s influential Spinozist-Deleuzean inspired notion of affects and the definitions that Spinoza and Deleuze’ reading of Spinoza actually present, I show how key points in the contemporary critique concerning the ontology, epistemology, and emancipatory politics of the new affect theory would be positioned in the Spinozist-Deleuzean account of affects. I conclude by claiming that the Spinozist-Deleuzean account in fact serves as one possible way of distinguishing between emancipatory and enslaving affects, hence hoping to clarify contemporary discussions about the emancipatory nature of affects.

Kasper Kristensen has been accepted as a PhD student in philosophical anthropology within the research program Engaging Vulnerability at Uppsala University, Sweden. Previously, he was a PhD student in social and moral philosophy at the University of Helsinki, Finland. His research focuses on the political dimensions of Baruch Spinoza’s thought, especially questions concerning affects and political or collective identities. Other interests include democratization, emancipatory politics and (social) ontology.

Keywords: affect, Gilles Deleuze, emancipatory politics, intentionality, Ruth Leys, Brian Massumi, Spinoza, Linda Zerilli

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WHAT CAN AN AFFECT DO? Notes on the Spinozist-Deleuzean Account

EMANCIPATORY TRANSFORMATIONS OR AFFECTIVE DETERMINISM?

Since the beginning of the affective turn in the social sciences during the 1990s, affect theory has provoked a wide range of excited admiration but also its share of sceptical critique. The most heated debate concerns the theoretical coherence of the new affect theory and its potential to evoke useful tools for emancipatory politics. This argument reflects the classic philosophical debate between idealism, materialism, rationalism and empiricism – or in affect theory’s vocabulary: between cognitive judgments (mind) and affective corporeal existence (body). The key concern is whether affects are autonomous from the cognitive appraisal or necessarily constituted by beliefs and human meaning-giving structures. The political question then deals with different types of emancipatory dimensions that the turn to affects is charged with. For instance in their The Affect Theory Reader (2010) Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth suggest eight different areas in which theorizing of affects has become crucial. What these partly overlapping areas share is an effort to offer a dynamic alternative to scientific thinking that highlights stasis, all-encompassing structures and fixed models. Here affects constitute a framework by which the dynamism and continuous becoming of reality can be taken into account in scientific research while also paying attention to the limits of representation and reason. It is thus argued that affects embody possibilities for creation, change and transformation with respect to the given state of affairs of the present.

However, in current research there has been a growing tendency to try to go beyond the ontological dichotomy between cognition and bodily affects. This effort springs from an undesirable implication of the new affect theory: it is argued that the ontological primacy of affect over cognition leads to affective determinism in which the affects prime human judgments without much scope for the intellect to intervene in the course of forming judgments and deciding upon action. Thus one could argue that affect theorists reproduce an old problem familiar to Marxist philosophy: if the material conditions determine an individual’s belief system, then any transition from the vicious circle of reproduction of existing (oppressive) social relations seems impossible. In a similar fashion it appears that the new affect theory has driven itself into two
theoretical impasses, where the first reproduces a Cartesian dualism between mind and body – only in a reverse order of giving ontological primacy to the body and its affects, the second stems from the difficulty to address the possibilities of intervening in the order of the affects. Thus both the potential for emancipatory transformations and the normative grounds for social change remain ambiguous in affect theory.

These arguments are put forward especially by the intellectual historian Ruth Leys and the political philosopher Linda M. G. Zerilli. Leys’s article »The Turn to Affect: A Critique« (2011) started a heated debate in the journal Critical Inquiry consisting of several responses by Leys and her critics. In her analysis Leys highlights the twofold foundation from which the new affect theory draws: American psychologist Silvan Tomkins’s theory of affects presented in the framework of basic or innate emotions and Spinozist-Deleuzean ideas of affects as non-linguistic, bodily intensities. Albeit the latter, at least at first sight, seems to oppose the former for its reductionism and genetically hard-wired emotional categories, Leys argues that there is a firm linkage between these accounts.

Moreover, what for Leys turn out to be the common denominator between the contemporary affect theorists is their commitment to anti-intentionalism, namely:

[...] the belief that affect is independent of signification and meaning. [...] What the new affect theorists and the neuroscientists share is a commitment to the idea that there is a gap between the subject’s affects and its cognition or appraisal of the affective situation or object, such that cognition or thinking comes too late for reasons, beliefs, intentions, and meanings to play the role in action and behavior usually accorded to them. The result is that action and behavior are held to be determined by affective dispositions that are independent of consciousness and the mind’s control.5

Later Leys adds that this theoretical stance will lead us into an undesirable future in which critique and judgment will be replaced by ‘caring’ and ‘empathetic’ attachment.6

Zerilli agrees with Leys’s claim about the shared anti-intentionalism of the new affect theorists. Furthermore, according to her the affect theory’s hostility towards conceptual thinking and cognitive judgment is based on poststructural »layer cake ontology«. This view posits the affective realm as prior and autonomous vis-à-vis the cognitive system, thus supposing different ontological layers of human experience.7

Despite that I find both Leys’s and Zerilli’s critiques well articulated, I am concerned about how the Spinozist-Deleuzean account of affects is presented as inspiring a dualist ontology.
Both Leys and Zerilli refer to the Spinozist-Deleuzean ideas of affect as one of the main sources leading to the differentiated registers of affect and cognition. This account is reconstructed especially through the work of the political philosophers Brian Massumi and William Connolly, but without any direct engagement with Deleuze or Spinoza. Interestingly, Leys wonders to what extent the new affect theorists represent the ideas of Spinoza and Deleuze but leaves the question open. Yet in the light of Leys’s and Zerilli’s consistent attack on (Cartesian) dualism, it seems to me that their critiques merit some attention with respect to Spinozist-Deleuzean ideas – not least because they are well-known for their immanent non-hierarchical ontology and anti-Cartesianism. Thus it strikes me as odd if their thought is taken to inspire a specific stream in affect theory leading to ontological layers or hierarchical dualism.

In this article I will investigate the Spinozist-Deleuzian account of the affects in the light of the aforementioned points of disagreement. I will begin by looking at the ways in which Leys’s claim about the anti-intentionalism and Massumi’s definition of the notion of affect stand with respect to the Spinozist-Deleuzean definition of affect. I will then proceed to show that Leys’s and Zerilli’s conclusion about the lost ground for rational judgment in affect theory does not apply to the Spinozist-Deleuzian account due to the distinction it makes between different kinds of knowledge, passivity and activity. Here I will study the so-called common notions, which for Spinoza form the key to an adequate reasoning process. From this basis I proceed to demonstrate reason’s capacity to intervene in the order of the affects, which in turn leads to my consideration of the political and emancipatory dimensions linked to affects. Finally, I argue that the Spinozist-Deleuzean account succeeds in making a normative distinction between good and bad affects that is defined in terms of augmentation and diminution of the human power to act.

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THE ONTOLOGY OF THE AFFECTS: MIND AND BODY

In this section I will study the Spinozist-Deleuzean account of affects by juxtaposing it with two crucial definitions for the subject matter of this paper: Leys’s definition of intentionality and Massumi’s definition of the affect.

In his response to Leys, William Connolly rightly calls for the defining features of intentionality, to which Leys gives the following answer:

From my perspective, intentionality involves concept-possession; the term intentionality carries with it the idea that thoughts and feelings are directed to conceptually and cognitively appraised and meaningful objects.
in the world. The general aim of my paper is to propose that affective neuroscientists and the new affect theorists are thus making a mistake when they suggest that emotion or affect can be defined in non-conceptual or nonintentional terms.\textsuperscript{13}

At first glance this might seem like a rather clear definition of intentionality. But in philosophical terms it evokes more questions than it answers, because it does not address any of the common matters of disagreement concerning intentionality. For example, what is the relation between our thoughts and external objects? How can we have true beliefs of non-existing things, such as things from the past, or thoughts about purely imaginary things? What defines the content of our thoughts, the external object (externalism) or the concept available to us in our mind (internalism)? On this last point there is also disagreement between Leys and Zerilli. Zerilli points out that Leys’s rather Kantian account of intentionality as concept possession disregards a fundamental aspect in affect theory, namely that of raising questions about the responsiveness of our concepts to human experience and the possibility of discerning something new in the world.\textsuperscript{14} Furthermore, Leys’s definition seems to rely on the idea that our thoughts are directed toward objects that are independent of our mind – an idea that is fundamentally questioned by Spinoza.\textsuperscript{15} The reasons for this will be demonstrated in detail after briefly considering the way in which Massumi defines the concept of affect.

In his »Notes on the Translation« to Deleuze’s and Felix Guattari’s \textit{A Thousand Plateaus} Massumi defines \textit{affect} and \textit{affection} as follows:

\textit{— AFFECT/AFFECTION.} Neither word denotes a personal feeling (sentiment in Deleuze and Guattari). \textit{L’affect} (Spinoza’s \textit{affectus}) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act. \textit{L’affection} (Spinoza’s \textit{affectio}) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include ›mental‹ or ideal bodies).\textsuperscript{16}

This definition of affect as »an ability to affect and be affected« is later repeated in Massumi’s work on affect and has been subsequently taken up by several scholars on affect.\textsuperscript{17} Even Leys connects it with Spinoza: »In many texts, the concept of affect is tied to a ‘nonrepresentationalist’ ontology that defines affect in terms derived from Spinoza as the capacity to affect and be affected.«\textsuperscript{18}
Interestingly, Massumi’s »Spinozist-Deleuzean inspired« definition will be found neither in Spinoza nor Deleuze. In fact, in both of his books on Spinoza Deleuze defines Spinoza’s affect as feeling (fre. Sentiment) while the renowned Spinoza translator Samuel Shirley translates affect as emotion. How, then, should these disparities be understood? What is the relation between affect as »prepersonal intensity« criticized by Leys and Zerilli and affect as emotion criticized by Massumi?

I will begin to address these ambiguities by making sense of an extremely important notion: namely power (Lat. potentia, Fr. puissance) – a notion that is conspicuously absent from Leys’s and Zerilli’s analyses, and something that Massumi again ties to the capacity to affect and be affected.

In effect, affect has a strong resemblance to power. Deleuze’s notion of intensity, often utilized by Massumi to characterize affect, refers to the degree of power that a body or a composition of bodies harbours. In his reading of Spinoza, Deleuze highlights that differences in intensity are nothing else than expressions of individuation itself: individuation connotes the degree of intensity by which individual bodies are differentiated from other individual bodies. This is fully in line with Spinoza’s dynamic ontology in which transformations in degrees of power are the defining characteristics of becoming. Similarly, Spinoza defines individual essences according to their degree of power.

Let me then quickly clarify some of the crucial notions of Spinozism with respect to the notion of power. For Spinoza the whole universe or Nature embodies one single power, the power of Substance or God or Nature. Albeit infinite, this power can only be expressed by particular things (modes) whereby God’s attributes are expressed in definite and determined ways.

Consequently, human beings are modes that express God’s power in two attributes, thought and extension. According to the parallelism doctrine, the order and connection of ideas is the same as that of things. Thus for Spinoza the human mind is the idea of an actually existing body. Moreover, all extensive bodies consist of either simple bodies or compositions of bodies that can unite into larger individuals so that ultimately the whole of reality or Nature can be conceived as one single individual. Accordingly, as our body consists of many bodies, our mind consists of many ideas and everything that happens in our body is necessarily perceived by our mind.

Furthermore, all singular entities embody a certain degree of power by which they persist in existence. The individual power of acting by which each thing strives to persevere in existence Spinoza calls conatus. Human conatus for its part is always expressed as will or appetite, or when we are conscious of our appetite it is called desire.
to increase the power of acting. However, the degree of human power of acting and the objects of desire respectively are dependent on affections caused by other entities and affects that express the nature of these affections.

Now Spinoza’s concept of *Nature* (with capital »N«) refers to the totality of everything that exists, but *nature* often refers to this power as it is qualified by individual essences. For example *human nature* means the causal powers that humans embody, and this power is their very essence. The power of Nature never contradicts itself, whereas the power of modes is always qualified by those relations that constitute the given mode’s essence and thus can come into opposition with the power of other modes. Accordingly, Spinoza maintains that the power of all singular things is constantly overcome by the power of other things. 24 Similarly, the human power or capacity to affect and be affected can vary considerably due to the different capabilities that bodies have during their lifespan, and also due to the relations a given body enters into: some will augment the given body’s capacities, such as nutrition and tools, and some diminish it, such as illness or poison. 25

Thus the capacity to affect and be affected is always at play. To exist for Spinoza means that one affects, that is, one has causal efficacy. And similarly, one is affected by other entities with causal efficacy of their own. Deleuze clarifies this in reference to power: »In Spinozism all power bears with it a corresponding and inseparable capacity to be affected. And this capacity to be affected is always, necessarily, exercised.« 26 In effect, causality for Spinoza designates the necessary laws by which things follow from God’s nature or power. 27 Accordingly, the continuation of human existence is dependent on countless external objects, and the more we can be affected by good affections the more power of acting we will embody. But, on the other hand the capacity of being affected is always exercised when a given affection diminishes our power of acting. Hence Massumi’s identification of affects with capabilities and power seems at first to be accurate: affects and affection are themselves to be seen as degrees of power, or intensities, that further cause effects according to the constitution of the entities involved. But this interpretation will turn out to be rather problematic as it confuses a very important difference between affect and affection.

This becomes clear with Spinoza’s definition of affect: »By emotion (affectus) I understand the affections of the body by which the body’s power of activity is increased or diminished, assisted or checked, together with the ideas of these affections. Thus, if we can be the adequate cause of one of these affections, then by emotion I understand activity, otherwise passivity.« 28 We can see that affect (translated as emotion) in Spinoza can only be defined by referring to affections of the body with
the corresponding ideas in the mind. But whereas affects always express a transformation in the power of acting from an individual experiential point of view, the affections should be understood as designating what happens to a given mode from a more general point of view; what kind of forces and bodies it encounters and how other modes modify it with their affections. All of these affections, then, correspond to the power of the mind to form ideas of the affections. And these ideas further direct the mind to produce other ideas, namely emotions, if a given idea of an affection involves a transition in the power of acting. These variations in the power of acting are experienced under the general categories of joy, desire and sadness. In accordance with Spinoza, Deleuze maintains that affects always presuppose the affections from which they are derived, although they cannot be reduced to them.²⁹

The reason why affects cannot be reduced to affections lies in the old wisdom of Heraclitus, according to which all things are subject to constant change: one cannot step into the same stream twice.³⁰ Accordingly, the precise affects springing from affections are themselves dependent on associations with other ideas, memories and imaginings, in other words, on the affective composition of a given individual.³¹ A given affection can cause a variety of affects, joyful or sad, due to the changing composition of the individual. Thus Massumi’s identification of affect with the capacity or ability to affect and be affected cannot be maintained – except as a nominal definition drawn from the following formula: individual essence equals conatus which equals the ability to affect and be affected which in turn is always expressed as desire which is an affect in itself. But this is simply synonymous with the definition of any mode of existence and does not say anything of particular affects, that is, of affects as qualified and determined by individual essences and given affections. For the latter always designate the experience of the fluctuation in the power of acting which is expressed in various forms of joy, desire and sadness.

Accordingly, in the Ethics Spinoza posits a necessary linkage between emotion or affect and a corresponding idea of the object causing the affect in the mind.³² Consequently, for Spinoza affects are always emotions directed to something, that is, they do have an intentional structure just as Leys argues. But now, and very crucially, the object of our affects is not so much an external object as an affection of our own body. How is this to be understood? We should bear in mind that everything that happens in the object of our mind, that is in the body, is perceived by our mind, and that all of the affections of our body have a corresponding idea that the mind produces. But from this it follows that we are mostly aware of the affections of our body, not directly of the external objects. In Deleuze’s words: »What we call an ‘object’ is only the effect an object has on our
body; what we call ‘me’ is only the idea we have of our own body and our soul insofar as they suffer an effect.\(^33\)

From this perspective the nature of intentionality and cognition vis-à-vis emotions and beliefs proposed by Leys takes a different form. According to Spinoza there is no a priori structure of consciousness, except to the extent there can be said to be an a priori structure of the body and its affections. Furthermore, desire can be determined by any given affection.\(^34\) And because we necessarily perceive the affections of our body, it follows that our conatus or desire is always conscious. Consequently, consciousness, together with its intentional objects, consists of the awareness of bodily affections and the corresponding emotions as designating the transition to a greater or lesser power of acting. Hence Spinoza is able to claim that: \(»[…]\) we do not endeavour, will, seek after or desire because we judge a thing to be good. On the contrary, we judge a thing to be good because we endeavour, will, seek after and desire it.\(^35\)

Let us then return to Leys’s argument for the shared anti-intentionalism of the new affect theorists, and her claim that our »thoughts and emotions are directed to conceptually and cognitively appraised and meaningful objects in the world«. Contrary to what Leys seems to suppose, Spinoza and Deleuze agree with Leys’s claim that affects are intentional: affects are themselves ideas that correspond to the fluctuation of human power of acting expressed as emotions of joy or sadness. And these emotions necessarily have an object of which we are conscious (the object being either confusedly or adequately grasped). But Leys’s second claim about the objects of our thoughts and emotions being cognitively appraised is a more dubious one. I have shown that for Spinoza and Deleuze there is no doubt that humans appraise the objects they encounter, but this appraisal results most often from an imaginary construction based on the affections that the objects cause in the body. Thus the appraisal mixes the objective being of the affecting object with the state of the affected body. Accordingly, it is not the cognitive judgment that appraises the objects but rather the affections that determine the content of human judgments. In this regard it makes perfect sense to think affections as prior to consciousness and as »prepersonal intensities«.

But have we now not arrived at the very position criticised by Leys and Zerilli, namely, that prepersonal affective dispositions determine our emotions, judgments and actions? This in effect is the case insofar as we are determined to act externally, which Spinoza identifies with passivity. According to Spinoza, while being passive, humans have only inadequate knowledge of their body and mind respectively. But passivity does not constitute the human condition entirely. Spinoza also maintains that we produce adequate ideas and active affections that enable us to be determined to act internally from our own power of acting.
Surprisingly then, Leys’s and Zerilli’s concern over how the new affect theory runs the risk of affective determinism comes very close to the Spinozist-Deleuzean concern over how to get hold of our power of acting, that is, to act from our own nature. In Deleuze’s words the great ethical question that Spinoza poses is »can finite modes attain to active affections, and if so, how?« We shall see that this ethical question concerns precisely the mind’s power to control and check the power of the passive affects. In the next section, I demonstrate how the passage from passivity to activity runs through the common notions that constitute the ground for attaining adequate knowledge and empowering affects.

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THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE AFFECTS:
PASSIVITY AND ACTIVITY

Even though Spinoza’s epistemology is rather complex, the general framework is surprisingly simple: to explain through the notion of power why and how (wo)men come to have the ideas that they have. Here I also agree with Zerilli when she claims, with reference to Leys, that affect theory’s concern with the mind and body expresses a longstanding philosophical problem that will not be »answered by reiterating intentionality as concept possession.« Rather, what is needed is an ontological understanding of concept-formation, and I believe that Spinoza can help us here.

First of all, for Spinoza an idea is »a conception of the Mind which the Mind forms because it is a thinking thing.« As an infinite thinking thing God has all ideas adequately due to his power of involving all existing modes in the attribute of thought. Humans, on the contrary, do not possess as powerful a mind as to be able to encompass all ideas adequately, and accordingly, the human capacity to form distinct ideas of things and their differences is constantly overcome by the diversity of these differences. Hence, insofar as the number of these differences exceeds our capacity of forming clear and distinct conceptions, our ideas become entangled and confused.

Furthermore, the affections of our body always indicate more of the state of our own body than the nature of the external objects as such. Consequently, our ideas of external objects confuse that which takes place in our body and the features of the objects encountered. In this way, the mind focuses rather on effects than causes, thus producing ideas that are like conclusions without premises. Accordingly, we remain passive to the extent the ideas of our bodily affections determine our affects and beliefs. This is because our course of action is determined externally by whatever encounters we happen to have. But what then is an adequate idea?

A very fundamental point in Spinozism, and strongly put forward by Deleuze, is the view that there are different kinds of
ideas which express and indeed involve different degrees of reality or power. To generalize somewhat, we can distinguish between three types of ideas: adequate ideas taken independently of their objects; ideas that represent affections; and ideas that express the transition towards greater or lesser power of acting (affects). In contrast to the latter two, adequate ideas do not have a representational relation to their objects, but rather they express the given object in the attribute of thought. Put differently, they express the nature of their object adequately, that is, not as representation but as expression of the nature of the idea as an idea with its order and connection with other ideas in the attribute of thought.\footnote{42}

This adequate idea is not, however, given to us immediately. The ideas we acquire through our immediate perception are rather those that represent what happens to our body.\footnote{43} Hence there is a crucial distinction between ideas whose content is determined by the affections of our body and those that our mind forms through its capacity to understand things adequately through their causes. While operating with confused ideas our mind is said to imagine. Imagination involves affective identifications that are characterized by arbitrary connections between ideas and the real objects. This kind of knowledge, formed through the effects that things have on us, Spinoza calls the first kind of knowledge, and it involves everything that can possibly involve error, such as imagination, beliefs and illusions. And it is precisely these modes of thought that lead us to confuse real properties and to form abstract universals, as Deleuze remarks: »This is why, insofar as our affections mix together diverse and variable bodies, the imagination forms pure fictions, like that of the winged horse; and insofar as it overlooks differences between outwardly similar bodies, it forms abstractions, like those of species and kinds.«\footnote{44}

In addition to the knowledge of the first kind we are also capable of the knowledge of a second kind. This kind of knowledge departs fundamentally from the first because it consists of adequate ideas and the activity of the mind. But as Deleuze rightly remarks, the forming of adequate ideas might appear miraculous when at first it seems as if everything in our composition leads us to only form confused ideas.\footnote{45} However, the second kind of knowledge allows us to grasp things in their individual relations, »to understand their agreement, their differences, and their opposition« as it were, and the genesis of this adequate understanding lays in common notions.\footnote{46}

According to Spinoza there are ideas that are necessarily adequate and common to all minds, such as the common properties of all bodies: extension, motion, and rest. But why are common notions adequate? Spinoza famously says that they are adequate because they concern properties that are equally in the part as in the whole, and thus can only be conceived
adequately. But what guarantees this adequacy? Recall that ideas are inadequate insofar they mix the nature of the external thing with the state of the affected body. But now a common notion indicates both the nature of the affecting body and the nature of the affected body in their agreement, thus expressing a common property or an identity of relations. Hence what Spinoza seems to suggest is that, first, an agreement cannot produce a confused idea because there is nothing to be confused; and secondly, a common property necessarily increases our power of acting. Thus there is nothing contrary to our mind that could cause the inadequacy. Therefore in my view it is a mistake to restrict common notions to involve only properties common to all modes in one of God’s attributes, as some commentators do. At least Spinoza’s says explicitly that the part and the whole do not need to refer exclusively to properties shared by all finite modes and God but can also mean a human body and some external body.

In a similar fashion, Deleuze anticipates this confusion by warning us not to overlook the biological and practical content of common notions in favour of their mathematical and speculative character. He also distinguishes between the two mentioned points of views vis-à-vis common notions: the most general concerning properties common to all bodies and those that only apply to some external bodies. This in effect, I argue, is a very fundamental point in Spinoza’s philosophy because it establishes the ground for distinguishing between the point of view of the total individual, God or Nature, and the modal experiential point of view. The importance of this is easily seen with respect to the most general common notions, which, from an individual perspective, nonetheless prove the least useful. This in that they only express agreement, but do not direct the mind toward forming an adequate understanding of differences and oppositions, which might prove harmful or even fatal to a given mode. Deleuze hence summarizes that the first common notions we form are thus the least universal, those, that is, that apply to our body and to another that agrees directly with our own and affects it with joy.

Consequently, common notions have an affective basis: they only spring from encounters in which we encounter some property by which our power of acting increases. Yet insofar as the ideas of our joyful encounters do not express the causes of our joy we remain passive, that is, we follow the course of nature without being able to seek or reproduce the joyful encounters. But common notions necessarily express their causes: they are produced by the power of the mind to understand an agreement between bodies. Simultaneously, they open the path for other adequate ideas because common notions are ideas that are in us as they are in God – hence expressing a given property of our essence together with God’s essence. It is
here then that we can begin to form adequate knowledge of our own essence with respect to other modes around us: some will agree with us to a greater degree, some to a lesser one. According to Spinoza, this is the beginning of activity, which means that the capacity to affect and be affected is determined by itself. In other words, activity occurs when our power of acting is the only cause for a given effect, and thus that the ensuing effect can be understood by our power alone. So the mystical leap from passivity to activity consists of producing an idea, that is a common notion, of which our reason is the adequate cause because this idea would not exist without the power of the mind to form ideas (remember that a confused idea would not be brought only by the understanding of the mind but rather by the affection of whose causes we are ignorant).

For Spinoza and Deleuze reason is not something pre-given; rather, it needs to be produced according to the affections as «clear and distinct understandings of their causes. Thus reason can only be defined nominally as, for instance, «an effort to select and organize good encounters» but what these encounters constitute in reality cannot be known in advance. Rather the knowledge thereof needs to be produced through common notions expressing the cause of our joy and thus indicating what we should seek and enforce. And when these ideas are adequate, they will necessarily produce other adequate ideas that express the order and connection of ideas with their relations to other ideas – finally connecting all the entities to one single nature. Hence common notions and adequate ideas already direct the mind towards what Spinoza calls the intuitive or third kind of knowledge, the highest degree of reason. It is this higher reason with which we understand things through the adequate idea of certain of God’s attributes, which in turn leads to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things.

Now the intentional object of the mind and emotions has changed again: from a confused and passive affection to an adequate and active one. Moreover, according to Spinoza the power of understanding includes a capacity to remove an affect from its external cause. In this way emotions are detached from their imagined intentional object and are joined with other ideas. By this manoeuvre the emotion (an idea in itself) can be linked with adequate ideas and its confused content be reduced to a minimum. Furthermore, every affecting body by definition has something in common with the properties of the human body and thus, by the laws of common notions, each affection can be understood adequately – given that the power involved in the affection is not contrary to the human power of acting. Hence activity involves the power of the mind to understand affects through their causes, by which the power of passive affects or passions over human beings may be turned into (wo)men’s own empowerment.
Consequently, the way in which Massumi detaches affect from lingual meaning, representation and identification\(^{57}\) alternately characterizes affect as pure capacity\(^{58}\) or unqualified intensity\(^{59}\). Obviously poses a problem in the light of the proper Spinozist-Deleuzean account. For Spinoza and Deleuze (in his writings on Spinoza) affect is never free from meaning and identification, nor can it be pure capacity. The relevant questions are rather whether the causal relations behind affects are adequately or confusedly grasped, and to what extent the individual is passively and to what extent actively determined to action.

Thus I would be hesitant, as Leys and Zerilli are also, towards Massumi and others who rejoice at that which escapes understanding regarding affect. In the Spinozist-Deleuzean account this would simply be called ignorance and impotence, leading to imaginary ideas and a corresponding fluctuation in political action. For Spinoza it is precisely the fact that we are ignorant of the causes of things and judge everything from the affects we have that leads us to form the illusions of free will, teleology with respect to nature, and an anthropomorphic God.\(^60\) Confused ideas separate us from understanding the real relations of the world, leading individuals to judge everything from their own particular affects. This forms a fundamental political problem for Spinoza and Deleuze. Hence it seems that those contemporary affect theorists who emphasise the different systems of cognition and affect are moving away from Spinozist-Deleuzean ideas. In fact, the Spinozist-Deleuzean position appears to be much closer to Leys’s and Zerilli’s concern with meaning and signification than Leys and Zerilli themselves seem to acknowledge.

For example, according to Leys and Zerilli the differentiation between cognition and affect renders meaning, signification, and ideology matters of taste. In the Spinozist-Deleuzean account this corresponds to the problem of everyone judging things according to their own affects. This position has obvious political implications, as Zerilli points out: »The question left unanswered by affect theorists is how a judgment based on feeling could possibly be normative.«\(^61\) In other words, insofar (wo)men’s affects and their judgments differ there seems to be no ground for deciding whose affects count the most, and hence no justification for demands of social change. Zerilli herself emphasizes how normativity stems from the grammar of a given life form with its specific practises of rule-following, which include commitment and agreement on patterns of speaking and acting. However, given that other concepts, such as rights, freedom and wellbeing – often employed to make a normative distinction – remain undefined in her analysis, I do not see how there could be any normative differentiation between the given life forms. Spinoza and Deleuze, on the contrary, are absolutely clear on this point: rights, freedom
and wellbeing all correspond to the human power of acting. Next I will therefore consider the political implications of the Spinozist-Deleuzean way of anchoring normativity in power, and strive to show that emancipation for Spinoza and Deleuze springs from the collective process of becoming active.

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The Politics of the Affects and the Question of Emancipation

The Spinozist-Deleuzean account of the affects is best characterised as an ethical project in which the key is to come to know human nature adequately. By an adequate understanding of the limitations and possibilities inherent in human nature (wo)men can be, at least to some degree, liberated from enslavement to passions and thus enjoy freedom and happiness. Nonetheless, human nature is not an a priori essence but simply designates human power that varies according to its affections. This power is expressed as desire and thus, insofar human desire is determined by external affections, it can include contradictory aims that produce fluctuations in human power and emotions. Hence the real political question that Spinoza poses is how human nature or power can be determined so that it would not suffer from contradictory desires. As shown above, the answer lies in the process of becoming active, as human desires become more and more determined by our own power to produce good affections. Hence the Spinozist-Deleuzean account of activity means emancipation from contradictory passions by which, I argue, it connects two traditional themes concerning emancipation: the individual and collective approaches. The former highlights self-transformation and liberation from external dependency whereas the latter sees emancipation as an outcome of a political process overcoming some or all forms of human dominations over humans.

Importantly, in the Spinozist-Deleuzean account these two, the individual and the collective emancipation, necessarily correspond with one another. No individual is so powerful as to emancipate him/herself from the sway of passions alone but at the same time reason is to a great extent a collective project because its very production is dependent on common notions. Now one should recall that common notions spring from an agreement between properties, and according to Spinoza no individual in Nature has more relations and properties in common with human beings than other human beings. Hence reason as the conatus of the mind directs (wo)men to seek their own advantage, which is inseparable from seeking other people with whom to share this effort, with whom to become active. The crucial consequence of reason and activity from a political point of view is that they make individual natures or powers agree with one another. This is because whatever follows from human nature as it is defined by reason is good and common to
all (wo)men. Thus reason renders human desires to agree, from which it in turn follows that humans are motivated to act for shared ends to the common advantage of all.63

This definition of rationality comes close to what is traditionally understood by utopian politics, which entail an overcoming of all forms of human domination over other humans. Spinoza pictures this as the greatest agreement between humans, in which they compose one single mind and body, turning themselves into a unanimous political body (civitas).64 But unfortunately this sort of pure emancipation is never possible for human beings, because (wo)men simply do not possess the requisite power by which their minds could be constituted exclusively by adequate ideas and their bodies to entertain only empowering relations. Accordingly, as Deleuze remarks, the three kinds of knowledge correspond to three forms of life; to three forms of politics: that of passions; that of reason; and that of love springing from understanding things sub specie aeternitatis.65 Although the last is rare, I believe that the human condition should be thought of as a mixture of these three ways of living together; they all occupy human existence to different degrees.

Consequently, I would agree with Zerilli, Lettow and others who think that affects, in their twofold character, have the potential to generate both enslavement and emancipation. However, I think that because of a current and widespread postfoundational skepticism towards essentialism, humanism, identity politics and other foundations, there is a risk that a politics of affect will end up proposing emancipatory politics without a clear conception of who is to be emancipated from what, and precisely how this should come about. It seems to me that a theory of emancipation without a conception of human nature is akin to entertaining a conclusion without having duly considered its premises. The absence of such premises can be seen in Leys’s faith in reiterating intentionality as concept possession, as well as in Massumi’s positing affect as pure capacity. But it can also be seen in suggestions such as Brigitte Bargetz’s to use a politics of affect as a tool for a critique of »emotional power regimes« that govern unequally in terms of differentially distributing emotions but also in terms of governing through emotions.66 To me it is not at all clear why the knowledge we may acquire as a result of such a critique would lead us towards better power regimes – demonstrating this would require an explanation of the normative ground for a dichotomy between good and bad, particularly vis-à-vis governing, knowledge and emotions.

Now, the Spinozist-Deleuzean account of affects involves this explanation. And it produces it without recourse to a priori essences, universals or fixed identities, thus offering an alternative understanding of emancipation to the one criticized by
such thinkers as Laclau and Lyotard. In contrast to the idea of emancipation as the reclaiming of an original position or an arrival to the Promised Land, for Spinoza and Deleuze the good and bad are simply defined in terms of capacity to affect and be affected. Emancipation equals good affections that increase this capacity, and thus the adequate knowledge of affections is the most valuable to humans. Yet, making the augmentation of human capacities as the normative ground for political community is not at all straightforward: in order to secure the augmentation of reason and activity, there must be a sovereign that turns the individual passive judgments into collective good. But the Spinozist-Deleuzean political sovereign, let’s call it a state, does not govern exclusively with reason. Both Spinoza and Deleuze emphasize that because of their necessary passions, joyful and sad ones, people are not born as citizens but must be made so. And in this context reason is impotent: insofar as the dictates of reason do not emerge actively in each mind, they must be implanted externally through passive affections, namely, fear of punishment and hope for greater good. Thus the state is not a pure construction of reason, it is not born from (wo)men agreeing in their natures but from a combination of their fears and hopes, that is, from their passions. However, this political construction, the state, is needed for an environment in which reason can take more and more place – yet, on the condition that the affect of hope can be fostered at the expense of fear. This is because hope, a joyful passion, directs the minds of the citizens towards that which they have in common, while fear is a sad passion expressing human nature in opposition. Consequently, good government is always distinguished by its power to direct (wo)men towards reason and activity, whereas bad government is always at risk of falling back into a reign of passions, in which the good is not defined through common standards but according to a given faction’s interest such as class, religion or party.

Spinoza and Deleuze emphasize that social power relations can be built on and through passions, as in a religious or despotic state, but to such extent people will remain passive, sad and conflict-ridden, diminishing their collective powers. Consequently, if we want to harness the power of the affects for emancipation, we need to replace the sad passions with the empowering ones. Yet in order to do this we must have a clear understanding of the nature of the affects: what are their causes, why do some increase while others diminish our capacities and what they can do. This knowledge is thoroughly practical, because it can only be produced through real relations; it is the result of our own acting in the search for common notions. And it is only such knowledge that may help us to overthrow the great apparatuses that reign according to confused knowledge and sad passions. Deleuze calls them the
moralist trinity: the slave, the tyrant and the priest who are the ideal types for taking advantage of (wo)men’s weakness under their passions instead of directing them towards their own active capacities.69

And these ideal types, I argue, can be applied to any system of human domination that imposes abstract normative ideals on people, and thus directs them to think themselves through negation. Take for example gender-specific roles and skills, nationality and sexual orientation based rights, class-dependent possibilities and so forth. They are all confused ideas that define what individuals have or lack and what they can and cannot do according to imagination, not to the real capacities individuals harbour. Thus an answer to the question of what a body, or better yet a collective body social, can do, will only be reached when we replace confused knowledge and acting according to arbitrary normative ideals with an ethical practice of life according to common notions and adequate ideas. Hence real emancipatory politics would be nothing but a production of common notions according to the capacities that the collective ability to affect and be affected embodies.

ENDNOTES


2 These include 1) phenomenologies of embodiment 2) cybernetics and neurosciences 3) non-humanist and anti-Cartesian, often Spinoza-inspired processual philosophies, 4) intersubjectivity-based psychology and psychoanalysis 5) feminists, queer and disability studies 6) various attempts to turn away from the linguistic turn of the humanities 7) critical studies of emotions beyond interiorized subjectivity, and 8) science studies that emphasize material connections between the objects of scientific research. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth: »An inventory of shimmers« in Gregg and Seigworth (eds.), 5–7.


5 Leys: »The turn to affect: A critique«, 443.

6 Leys: »Facts and moods: Reply to my critics«, 889.

7 Zerilli: »The turn to affect and the problem of judgment«, 267–268.

8 Leys: »The turn to affect: A critique«, 442; Zerilli: »The turn to affect and the problem of judgment«, 267, 283 footnote 2.

9 Leys: »The turn to affect: A critique«, 441, footnote 20. Cf. 455, 468 where Leys also comments on the paradox linked to Massumi’s claim of being an antidualist Spinozist and yet ending up with classic mind-body dualism.

10 Zerilli: »The turn to affect and the problem of judgment«, 262 pp., 281.

11 I will limit my reconstruction of the Spinozist-Deleuzean account mainly to Spinoza’s magnum opus Ethics (Indianapolis, 1992 [1677]), and to Deleuze’s works in which he explicitly engages with Spinoza: Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza (New York, 1992[1968]); Spinoza: Practical Philosophy (San Francisco, 1988 [1970]), the essay »Spinoza and the Three ‘Ethics’« in Essays Critical and Clinical (Minneapolis, 1997 [1993]) and the chapters with the titles »Memories of a Spinozist, I – II« in A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Minneapolis, 2005 [1980], written in collaboration with Felix Guattari). This account is not be confused with Deleuze’s full account of the affects which would need to include at least his Nietzsche and Philosophy; What is Philosophy, Two Volumes of Cinema and Two Volumes of Capitalism and Schizophrenia. For an overview of Deleuze’s usage of the concept affect see Eugene B. Young: The Deleuze and Guattari Dictionary (Bloomsbury, London 2013), 23 pp.

12 Connelly: »The complexity of intentionality«, 794.
14 Zerilli: »The turn to affect and the problem of judgment«, 270–271.
17 See especially »Preface« and »Ideology and escape« in Massumi: *Politics of Affect*, 10, 214 (Cambridge, 2015) in which Massumi refers to »Spinoza’s well-known definition of affect as the capacity to affect or be affected«.
18 Leys: »The turn to affect: A critique«, 442, footnote 22. This definition of affect can be found also from Patricia Clough: »Introduction« in Patricia Clough & Jean Halley (eds.): *The Affective Turn* (Durham, 2007), 2; from Gregg and Seigworth: »An inventory of shimmers«, 2; and from John Protevi »Ontology, biology, and history of affects« in Bryant Levi et. al. (eds.): *The Speculative Turn* (Melbourne, 2011), 393.
20 Massumi: »Notes on the translation and acknowledgments«, xvii.
21 It is clear that Massumi’s usage of Deleuze’s concepts, such as intensity, are drawn from all over Deleuze’s work (also in collaboration with Guattari) which brings them in tension with my more restricted approach. Nonetheless, precisely because Deleuze’s concepts are modified during the course of his work we need to be cautious when referring to the Spinozist-Deleuzean interpretation of affects, because this cannot be established univocally by mixing Spinoza and all the different meanings Deleuze over time gives to affects. For Deleuze’s Spinozist use of the term intensity, see for example *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 197.
22 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 66, 73–77 (2p7, 2lem3d, 2lem7s, 2p15). When referring to *Ethics* I have included references to exact propositions, definitions, demonstrations, axioms, scholia etc. according to the standard in Spinoza scholarship.
24 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 44, 155 (1p17, 4ax).
25 Spinoza: *Ethics*, 72, 176–177 (2p13s, 4p38, 4p39s).
26 Deleuze: *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, 93.
I intend to refer to all human beings with the notion of (wo)men. But again this seems to imply a binary distinction whereas there are more sexes than two. While lacking a better inclusive word I use the notion of (wo)man. Notions such as person will not qualify either because of the philosophical-psychological load they carry.

Zerilli: »The turn to affect and the problem of judgment«, 271.

Spinoza is ambiguous in his definition of common notions, and there is no unanimity on the correct interpretation in Spinoza scholarship. For the universal interpretation see e.g. Diana Steinberg »Knowledge in Spinoza’s Ethics« in Olli Koistinen (ed.) Cambridge Companion to Spinoza’s Ethics (Cambridge, 2009), 152. I follow Deleuze’s emphasis on the different degrees of the generality of common notions, which is supported by Spinoza’s account of good and bad with respect to agreement and differences between bodies in 4p29–31, 5p10.
Affect, Sensation (Durham, 2002), 28, 40; »Navigating movements« in Politics of Affect.

58 Massumi: Parables for the Virtual, 16.
60 Spinoza: Ethics, 57–62 (1app.)
61 Zerilli: »The turn to affect and the problem of judgment«, 278. Also Leys: »The turn to affect: A critique«, 472.
63 Spinoza: Ethics, 155, 171, 195 (4d7, 4p35, 4p73); Deleuze: Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza, 265 pp.
64 Spinoza: Ethics, 163–164 (4p18s).
65 Deleuze: Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza, 289, 305.
66 Bargetz: »The distribution of emotions: Affective politics of emancipation«, 591.
67 Ernesto Laclau: Emancipation(s) (London, 1996); Jean-François Lyotard: Postmodern Condition (Manchester, 1984). See also Susanne Lettow: »Editor’s introduction«.
68 Baruch Spinoza: Political Treatise in Michael Morgan (eds.): Spinoza: Complete Works (Indianapolis, 2002 [1677]), 699 (Ch. 5, 2); Deleuze: Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza, 259.
Alena Minchenia, »Killjoy and the Politics of Laughter. Russian Television Humour about Alyaksandr Lukashenka and its Reception in Belarusian Online Media«

ABSTRACT
Drawing upon the perspective of the cultural studies of emotions, this article examines the reception of political satire and the re-contextualization of humour. More precisely, it investigates the multiplicity of tensions that come into play in the production, erasure, rediscovery, and reception in Belarusian Internet media of politically oriented Russian television humour mocking the Belarusian president Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The very phenomenon of comical representation aims at triggering a particular type of viewer response: laughter. But what if there is no laughter? To study this phenomenon, the concept of unlaughter, coined by Michael Billig, is drawn upon. Resonating with Sara Ahmed’s term killjoy, it helps to uncover inequalities reproduced in the circulation of humour. Who laughs and who is laughed at? The article looks at the construction of subjects and objects of laughter, as well as the emotions helping to shape the two. The extent to which the particular case discussed in this article might be illustrative of a broader function of political humour and unlaughter in creating and challenging power differentials is considered.

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Keywords: Belarus, humour, Internet-media, killjoy, politics of emotions, unlaughter

http://lir.gu.se/LIRJ
INTRODUCTION

The idea for this research came from a certain feeling of puzzle-ment and curiosity while monitoring charter97.org, the popular Belarusian opposition website, over a period of five years from 2008 onward. During this period, I noticed the existence of a particular type of news that frequently recurred on the site. These were reports about skits or political cartoons about the Belarusian president Alyaksandr Lukashenka, which were aired on evening shows on the main Russian television channel Pervyj Canal and then censured by Belarusian editors for broadcasting in Belarus. However, the parts of the programmes that were cut out from telecasting appeared in Belarusian opposition Internet sites (first on charter97.org, then reposted on nn.by, naviny.by, and belaruspartizan.org), becoming the subject of intense discussion and extensive commentary on all these forums. Unlike Belarusian television programmes that are not shown in Russia, it is worth noting here, in Belarus the programmes of the major Russian channels (Pervyj Canal, RTR, NTV) are retransmitted even to basic subscription audiences. The very direction of the media flow, in other words, if I may be allowed to jump ahead a little, is instructive of the power relations prevailing between the two countries.

The charter97.org featuring in this article is an oppositional media project in Belarus. The initiative was launched in 1997, with one hundred civic rights activists, intellectuals, independent journalists, and public figures in the country jointly signing an open letter criticizing the direction the Belarusian state had taken and demanding its democratic transformation. The following year, the group set up the website for itself as a press centre for its activities; subsequently, however, it developed into an independent media project acting on its own. A telling sign of its perceived influence is that access to charter97.org was blocked during the country’s 2001 presidential elections, which was the first time such Internet sites were blocked for political reasons in Belarus. Since then, the site and its team have regularly been subjected to different forms of pressure from the Belarusian authorities (including searches, confisca-
tion of technical equipment, and interrogation of journalists working for it). Nevertheless, charter97.org has become more and more directly involved in the country’s politics. During the 2010 presidential elections, for instance, it openly supported the politician and former Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Sannikov’s bid for the presidency. Following the political repression in the aftermath of the elections, the team running the site was forced to flee abroad. Its editor-in-chief Natallia Radzina spent six weeks in a KGB prison, then escaped from her house arrest, and finally was granted political asylum in the Netherlands. Since 2012, charter97.org has its office in Warsaw, Poland. Thus, this media project has clearly emerged as an openly political actor representing the liberal, pro-European part of the Belarusian opposition.

At first glance, Russian humorous representations of Lukashenka as retransmitted and debated in the Belarusian media sphere appear to offer rather straightforward evidence of a particular construction of the Belarusian state, and of the existence of censorship in Belarusian official media that targets whatever it perceives to constitute a critical portrayal of the country in general or president Lukashenka in particular. They also provide telling examples of how politics and media frequently intersect, influencing access to information for the broader public. In this article, however, I argue that the topic is of interest because it reveals something important about the function, dynamics, and social effects of political humour in the framing and conveying of social asymmetries. Furthermore, since Internet media are interactive, allowing the audience to comment, it sheds light on the issue of how political claims and assumptions underpinning visual representations and jokes are actually received.

The official relations between Russia and Belarus might look unproblematic on the surface. The Belarusian government has for long pursued a policy of close co-operation with Russia, discursively framed in terms of familial intimacy between the two countries based on close bonds of brotherhood. In turn, Russia has provided financial support for the Belarusian state, for instance through credits that were not associated with demands for liberal reforms, and reduced-price natural gas and oil. The geopolitical imagination underlying this politics, including its tensions and its consequences for Europe as a whole, are worth considering. In this article, one of my more theoretical goals is to examine how popular culture can shed light on these issues and thereby contribute toward a deeper understanding of power differentials and their significance in the region.

The main aim of this article is to scrutinize, through the analytical lens of the politics of emotions, discrepancies between expected (such as laughter) and received reception of
Russian television humour in a Belarusian online context. I attempt to analyse the reception of political humour transplanted from one geopolitical and media context to another, and to reveal the work of power involved in the politics of humour. To investigate these, the concepts of unlaughter and killjoy are employed as heuristic tools. The analysis will focus, first and foremost, on online comments given in response to Russian political satire posted on charter97.org. Methodologically, I look at the dialectics of laughter and unlaughter and changes in the object and the subject of humour in the process of reception. The main research question guiding the investigation is how the reception of political humour relates to the work of power behind the humour – whether it supports/reproduces or challenges the asymmetries constructed in the media representations. The more specific sub-questions addressed are as follows:

— What emotions are actualized in the reception of Russian television humour to describe and discuss it in its new context, and how are objects and subjects of these emotions constituted? What emotions are connected with unlaughter?

— What do killjoy comments do in relation to the power structures behind the humorous representations of Lukashenka (e.g., the positioning of the object of humour and those who are seen as laughing)?

— What are the limits of the critical potential in killjoy comments? What normative constructions are overlooked in the reception of the humour?

As demonstrated by previous research along qualitative and feminist lines, academic scholarships and writings are always «positioned».

When analysing the video materials and the Internet users’ comments drawn upon as the research data for this article, I do so as a leftist Belarusian feminist scholar with a critical attitude towards the country’s authorities, state, and dependency on Russia and Russian imperialist discourse, but also towards insensitivities and exclusions in oppositional discourses in Belarus. In what follows, I first present the theoretical background informing my analysis, discussing some important aspects regarding the conceptualization of humour, the notion of unlaughter, and the perspective of the cultural politics of emotions and a feminist «killjoy» in the investigation of the work of humour. After that, I describe the empirical data used in the study. Before turning to the actual analysis of these data, I first look at visual representations of, and then audience engagement with, Russian television humour about Belarusian president Lukashenka. Finally, I conclude by summarizing my findings and reflecting on the broader significance of my research.
Defining humour as “the enjoyment of incongruity,” Tsakova and Popa have not only engaged with philosophical traditions of looking at humour as matter of recognized incongruity (e.g., Aristotle, Kant, and Kierkegaard), but also created a direct link to its reception as a particular type of viewers’ reaction: enjoyment. However, what if the presumed amusement and pleasure are not there? “This is not funny” is a frequent response posted by readers on charter97.org in reaction to Russian television humour. To better understand this phenomenon, the notion of unlaughter as proposed by Billig promises to be helpful. For Billig, unlaughter refers to a deliberate withdrawal of enjoyment that reveals unequal geographies of humour. A similar idea is conveyed by Ahmed’s term “feminist killjoy,” which refers to a feminist who spoils the easiness of others’ pleasure by refusing to laugh, in a gesture that questions complacently ignored sexist content in anecdotes and jokes. Focusing on the work of killjoys and unlaughter enables me to conceptualize how the power asymmetries perpetuated by Russian television representations of Lukashenka can be challenged. This perspective also makes it possible to recognize the transformation of (un)laughter into shame and embarrassment, to capture discourses of fear and aversion, and to identify signs of pride and national belonging with greater clarity.

An important line of theorizing here concerns conflicting interpretations of humour as, on the one hand, subversive, challenging the power of normativity, and, on the other hand, something that supports and strengthens the existing social order. There is a substantial amount of empirical support demonstrating humour’s capability in both of these respects in the existing literature. What is important for the present purposes, however, is that this ambivalent quality of humour becomes particularly salient in repressive political systems. What characterizes the attitude of official power towards humour in general and humorous representations of itself in such systems can be described using Bakhtin’s notion of “the culture of seriousness.” Also the case under study in this article offers evidence of a high degree of sensitivity of the repressive state in this very regard. Indeed, humour can serve as a seemingly innocent tool for undermining the power and challenging its omnipresent character. Research on Lithuanian Soviet satirical press, the humorous actions of the Serbian Otpor movement, and emotions in protests in Central Europe in the 1980s and 1990s, for instance, has developed this argument further in the context of oppressive regimes.

At the same time, humour can also serve to support and reproduce the dominant order. As Pearce and Hajizada have
shown, in Azerbaijan humour is recognized as a tool that is both appealing and accessible to the broader public, leading it, therefore, to become frequently resorted to by the country’s ruling elite bent on discrediting its opponents. Also other research has taken a rather sceptical position towards the assumed subversive potential of humour. Krikman and Laineste have proposed that jokes and anecdotes in different (post) socialist countries, ultimately support the broader socio-political system. Still others have pointed out how the mediated character of contemporary humour in particular contributes to its function as something that can only help to preserve the status quo: the mass media disseminating it do not usually aim at promoting political change. This is especially relevant in contexts where the media remain state controlled. The humour examined in this article is broadcast by the major Russian television channel Pervyj Canal, a media actor that, owing to the paternalistic relationship between the state and the media in present-day Russia, serves in the first place the needs of the country’s political elites. The jokes and cartoons analysed below can thus be seen as representing a way of translating Russian political and media establishment’s perceptions of the Russian–Belarusian relationship and the Belarusian president into a popular form. What is important to note here is that the appearance of Russian television humour on a Belarusian Internet site alters the geographic and social context of the reception, allowing a different audience to engage with the images and texts put forth. A reception setting comparable to the one in this study is found in Ridanpää’s research on the Finnish reception of the Muhammad cartoon controversy in Denmark in 2005. What is relevant for the present article is not only that the study concentrates on the othering of Muslims and the inequality constructed through the resulting representations, but also that, through this focus, it goes on to ultimately reveal something of the specificity of Finnish society. In a similar vein this article, too, by explicating the effects of a de-contextualization of humour, is interested in investigating what the Belarusian reception of Russian humour might say about Belarusian society itself.

In recent years, audience research appears to have become more popular in cultural studies, not least as an attempt to balance the preoccupation in the field with analyses of representations and the resulting tendency to overestimate the power of these representations. In the field of critical geopolitics, reception is seen as a form of everyday social encounters that enact and express common geopolitical ideas. In their study of the comic skits with Ahmed the Dead Terrorist, Purcell, Brown, and Gokmen have defined this layer as »non-elite geopoltics.« According to them, »[l]egeification of non-elite popular geopolitics gives a voice to those actually affected by the geopolitical
practices of nation-states, and thus opens another empirical and grounded window in public (non-elite and/but popular) perceptions of geopolitical issues and realities. In line with this, the focus of this article is not so much on media and political power centres in Eastern Europe and/or the Russian-speaking world (Russia, Moscow, and Pervyj Canal) and their messages per se, as it is on those who consume these media products in their highly particular context of a Belarusian opposition website, feeling compelled to share their perceptions and responses with others through posted comments.

»(NO) LAUGHING MATTER«: DATA AND METHOD

The sample of online comments forming the empirical material for this research was selected using the following two main criteria:

— The comments (all on charter97.org) had to be to messages or stories posted on charter97.org about segments of Russian television shows mocking Lukashenka having been deleted from television programmes in Belarus but re-posted on charter97.org;
— the comments had to be »killjoy« comments or express reactions other than enjoyment and laughter.

As a first step, all entries on charter97.org reporting about redacted Russian humour about Lukashenka in the period 2008 through 2013 were collected. The resulting sample comprised a total of 13 cartoons from the project Mul’tichnosti (»Cartoon Personalities«) and a total of 11 episodes of the Russian television programmes Prozhektorparishilton (Searchlight Paris Hilton), Bol’shaya raznitsa (Big Difference), and Vechernij Urgant (Evening with Urgant). All the video segments had been produced and originally broadcast by Pervyj Canal and then retransmitted on the territory of Belarus by the Belarusian television channel ONT. Following the period 2008–2013, the kind of news materials in the interest of this study disappeared from charter97.org. Altogether, the number of comments posted to all videos on charter97.org amounted at the time of the research to 975, or 35,591 words in total. These differed in length, ranging from brief exclamations to highly elaborated opinion pieces of several paragraphs in length.

Two circumstances related to these reader comments need to be noted here. First of all, every item on the website informing about redacted Russian jokes about Lukashenka allowed readers to participate in an online discussion about it. The number of comments posted in the period under study was regularly quite high: the average number of comments received
by an item was 54, with the maximum number of comments received by a single item being 142 and the minimum 32. In other words, the humorous Russian videos about Lukashenka can be said to have undoubtedly gotten the Belarusian audience’s attention. Secondly, for this analysis only comments expressing unlaughter and speaking from the position of a killjoy were looked at. In general, the fact that the Belarusian state exercised censorship over television did not come as a surprise to the website’s audience. It was barely commented on in the discussions around the Russian television jokes about Lukashenka. The typical pattern followed by the online discussions on the site was this: following a few relatively brief comments expressing enjoyment about the video under discussion, other opinions that introduced new dimensions, either emotional or political, appeared. It should also be noted here that, as the latter, quite typically, were more verbal, wordy, and elaborate (instead of being just standard «thumbs-up» type comments marked graphically with »+1« or a smiley face entered to indicate a shared reaction), they offered substantially more material for the analysis. Any posts of a more technical nature (such as questions about access to videos, possibility to download them, etc.) were excluded from the research data. All in all, the sample then came to consist of a total of 816 individual comments. What is important to note here is that the study was not interested in measuring the popularity of any particular posting or response to it; rather, the aim was to inquire into the dynamics of «unlaughing» reception of Russian television humour among Belarusian Internet audiences of charter97.org.

For this study, the method of discourse analysis as developed by Potter and Gill was relied on when analysing the comments in the sample. Focusing on the way language is used, on its function as a social practice embedded in power relations, this method showed a good fit with the aim of the study to examine «what emotions do», as Ahmed has put it. Its toolkit likewise promised to be helpful for analysing how unlaughter is constructed and what killjoy comments present as the subject and the object of the humour in question.

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**THE AUDIENCE AS KILLJOY: NEGOTIATING EMOTIONS AND QUESTIONING OBJECTS AND SUBJECTS OF RUSSIAN TELEVISION HUMOUR IN BELARUSIAN ONLINE FORUM DISCUSSIONS**

This section begins with a short discussion of the various representations of Lukashenka as found in the Belarusian-censured parts of Russian television programmes. The discussion provides a necessary background for the subsequent analysis of what happens after these media messages are sent.
to their audiences. What kind of reactions result from the enlarged circulation, made possible by modern technology, of the humour in question, and how do killjoy comments to it position themselves vis-à-vis the power structures that that humour bolsters or makes manifest?

Representations of Lukashenka in Russian television satire

The images of the Belarusian president Lukashenka in the Russian television humour combined signs of provinciality and claims to power, with the former rendering the latter rather unfounded and ridiculous looking. An animated character of Lukashenka, for example, lives alone in a wooden house, with lowing of cattle heard in the background. There is little furniture in the picture: only a throne standing in the room and portraits of Lukashenka himself hanging on the walls. Such signs of ambition and egocentrism are, however, countered by straw and logs lying around right by the throne and big sacks of potatoes that Lukashenka is portrayed as peeling by himself. Although dressed in a suit and tie, Lukashenka speaks Trasianka, a Belarusian-Russian mixed speech with negative connotations that is used mainly in the countryside; sometimes, he is also presented as playing the bayan, a folk musical instrument signifying Lukashenka and his context as being out of date, simple, and rural.

In the cartoons and in the evening show narratives, Lukashenka was also presented as a person with little knowledge and limited intellectual abilities, as someone uncritical of himself and oftentimes not well mannered. The cartoons portraying him participating in different popular television shows relied on the same pattern. In them, Lukashenka is depicted as never being able to give the correct answers to even the most elemental questions, while at the same time boasting about his abilities and, clearly, taking pride in himself. He is shown compensating for his poor education by either resorting to various tricks and deception or manipulating the feelings of others.

The main theme in all the video fragments examined was the economic problems of Belarus. Typically, Lukashenka was portrayed as being in desperate need for money. In the cartoons, he not only literally begged for alms by singing and dancing in front of then Russian finance minister Kudrin, but also stole things like a candlestick from the British queen or tried to sell a tractor to Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. Significantly, none of these other characters appeared to take him seriously. Lukashenka is also seen approaching Italy’s Berlusconi and Germany’s Merkel to ask them for money, without succeeding in getting any help from either. In this context, Russia was then always presented as the only solu-
tion, with Lukashenka having to come back to sing and dance for Kudrin every time.

While it is true that the financial support indeed offered by Russia to Belarus to a large extent shapes the relationship between the two countries, what is of interest for this study is the way this circumstance is played out and depicted in popular culture. Not only is that relationship couched in terms of extreme economic dependency and disparity, of even such a magnitude that Russian game shows are portrayed as representing the best strategy for budget improvements for Belarus: Russia is also depicted as being in fact the country’s only hope. In many cartoon episodes, the Lukashenka character must in the end turn back to Russia following his failed attempts to obtain support elsewhere.

Underpinning all these depictions of Lukashenka in search of monetary help, there is a dichotomous view of international relations, with the two poles of Russia and the United States/European Union structuring world affairs. This binary opposition reveals that the imagination of world politics in Russian media still relies on a Cold War-era configuration of terms, with its explicit ideas of the enemy and the protecting ally. In one cartoon episode, Lukashenka is confronted with a demand to choose who he wants to be friends with – Russia or Europe. While the general assumption behind the demand was that a closer collaboration with Europe would jeopardize Belarus’s ties with Russia, it also reveals that Russian popular culture was characterized by dichotomous thinking about geopolitical power already long before the developments that explicitly drew upon and cultivated it, such as the Russian aggression in Ukraine from 2014 onward.

Lastly, it is worth paying attention to the particular context in which the Lukashenka character in the materials studied is represented. In one talk show programme, the Russian host Ivan Urgant is shown flashing his MacBook computer with the portrait of Lukashenka on it, uttering: »We try to combine all incompatible things: Lukashenka and Apple have never been this close to each other before«. This short expression posits Lukashenka as being in opposition to everything that, like the MacBook, is considered to be modern, fashionable popular and technological. In other evening shows, Belarus is portrayed as outdated and connected to a bygone (Soviet) era. In a Prozhec-torparishilton programme it is joked that no one (except Russia) will buy Belarusian tractors, having not seen the Soviet cartoon demonstrating how they work. Thus, there is another layer of meanings constructed by these humorous representations, connected to the discursive work of othering and the construction of hierarchical relationships between the two countries of Russia and Belarus.
Unlaughter I: Focusing on the object of humour and feeling subjects

Before turning to the actual analysis of the comments studied, a brief description of the composition of the audience of charter-97.org is in order. Although comments posted in Internet media do not allow for the identification of any precise social characteristics of their authors, the sample nevertheless contained several cases where commenters openly presented themselves as Russian citizens or as inhabitants of Russia. Usually, this happened in response to anti-Russian views, posted on charter-97.org by, presumably, its Belarusian viewers. Another important observation regarding the characteristics of the website’s audience is that, in their comments, its members made no attempt to deny the political realities in Belarus as reflected through the humorous representations, for example by defending Lukashenka or the legitimacy of his rule. This is likely due to the oppositional identity of website itself and the audience the media project consequently attracts. A shared assumption underlying all comments studied for this article was the recognition of the contested nature of Lukashenka’s presidency, as being of virtually unlimited power and, apparently, duration as well.

In examining the comments in question from the perspective of the politics of emotions, I was interested in the shifts and dynamics in what could be identified as the object and the subject of (un)laughter, as well as in the emotions that the website viewers expressed when responding to the messages. At first glance, Russian media were the subject here, producing jokes about Lukashenka as the object of their humour. The jokes themselves were expected to create an experience of amusement and enjoyment for their audiences, so that they in turn would become a laughing subject. Here, responses expressing approval and enjoyment of jokes as such could be questioned as to their ability to perceive and problematize the power structures behind the humour: who was speaking, about whom, and why in just this particular manner. The issue, as already suggested, was rather more readily confronted by comments classifiable as representing the phenomena of killjoy and unlaughter, showing an unwillingness to comply with the politics of mockery. Accordingly, it was necessary to differentiate between the various comments offered, based on how they related to the work of power in the humorous Russian television representations of Lukashenka.

To begin with, there were comments that did not openly engage with the power structures expressed or manifested through the television jokes. Two main functions could be identified for this type of discussions. First of all they, served to create distance to the object of the humour (Lukashenka) and, second, contributed to the construction of a feeling subject (the viewers) as a particular community.
One of the ways a killjoy reaction could manifest itself in the comments was through anti-Lukashenka statements. Here viewers openly expressed strong negative sentiments (e.g. hatred, disgust and contempt) towards, and personal frustration with, the object of the television laughter. Importantly, in these cases the object of the television humour and the object of the emotions expressed coincided. The emotions prompted by the encountered images of Lukashenka were aimed at creating distance from, and negating, their object. In this kind of comments, posters frequently resorted to using the shorthand »ШОС« (from »Wish He’d Dies) that, in the aftermath of 19 December 2010, had become a well-known signifier of oppositional feelings towards Lukashenka. Comments along these lines could state, for example, that:

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This psychotic man is not funny anymore. (Poster »Bel«, 30 May 2011) To this one user replies: 100%, fed up, I feel sick of seeing his face (even in Multlichnosti) (»oHo666«, May 30 2011).

He doesn’t hold anything sacred, shows not even a shred of shame, no conscience. HEROD will burn in HELL (»Nika Kalinovskaya«, 25 October 2010).

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It is worth noting the reference to Herod, the ancient king of Judea, in the last quotation. In everyday language »Herod« holds a meaning of an extremely cruel person, whose actions are morally corrupted and violent, which in this context functions as a metaphor for Lukashenka.

In some comments the posters also turned the attention towards themselves. In these cases, a feeling subject was constructed against the backdrop of an anti-Lukashenka rhetoric. Interestingly, this was done based on predominantly negative emotions. Some of these commenters reported themselves to feel sad and wanting to cry, not laugh when watching the videos, while others stated that they felt ashamed. There were also commenters who spoke about feeling frightened by the fact that the portrayed situation is actually truthful and those who spoke of their experience of the Russian television humour about Lukashenka in terms of offence and humiliation. Examples of this type of comments include the following:

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This is not laughter; this is the fear that someone from abroad can say things you yourself are afraid of talking about publicly (»Frau Mila«, 21 April 2013).

I should speak about disgust, aversion and shame, for living in the best (?) country with such a ruler (»Lysy«, 23 March 2009).
So I watched this cartoon and feel ashamed, just ashamed (»Zhenka«, 1 January 2013).35

Funny, but it is frightening to live (»Irina«, 1 January 2013).36

Importantly, these emotions were ascribed not merely to the authors of these comments themselves, but to an entire social group, the Belarusian people in general. One of the discursive means through which this was typically attained was the employment of the first-person plural pronoun »we«, which extended the speaking subject to the entire nation or »the people«. Such generalizations appeared to have a two-fold task. Firstly, they all, explicitly or implicitly, were geared to construct a particular community, based on articulated divisions and comparisons between those supporting Lukashenka and those standing in opposition to him in Belarus or between Belarusians and Russian. The following case is an example of the latter:

It’s time to REMEMBER! It’s time to LEARN! These people sitting on their oil wells don’t know and don’t want to know that WE Belarusians are not their brothers and not beggars! Ours is the first constitution in the world!37 We fought Tatars and Germans until they had their tails between their legs! (»Dzmitry«, 26 April 2013).38

Secondly, the constructed communities were frequently presented as distinguished by their internally shared positions, feelings, and challenges. Among the issues identified in this regard as particularly Belarusian problems, revealed as such by the very existence of the main Russian television channel’s humorous cartoons and skits about Lukashenka, were the absence of national pride, inability to stand up for oneself, and excessive patience and obedience. The quote above is instructive in this regard, as it shows the Russian television’s representations of Lukashenka to be perceived as implying an unequal relationship between the Belarusian president and the Russian political elite. The nationalist reactions it exemplifies were aimed at restoring national dignity, indicating a sense of discomfort with this relationship. The comment quoted above takes distance from both the political discourse that posits there to be brotherhood between Belarusians and Russians and any type of media discourse that suggests the (financial and intellectual) incapacity of Lukashenka to be representative of Belarusians as a people or the nation of Belarus as such. In this manner, such comments expanded the object of the mockery and criticism in the Russian jokes: it was now presented to be not only, or even at all, about Lukashenka as a person, but
rather about the Belarusian people in general. The following quote illustrates this well:

— This is the problem – with us – the Belarusians! Right now we’re scolding Batska, but give us free elections and we’ll again choose a similar “batska” and then we’ll be surprised… And we won’t live, but decay once more (Tamara, 30 May 2011).

In general, the unlaughter in this kind of comments can be understood as expressing emotional work related to discomfort about both the object of the humor reacted to (Lukashenka) and laughter, perceived as a humiliating gesture in the context of the videos.

— Unlaughter II: Challenging the legitimacy of those laughing

There were also many comments that could be classified as unlaughter, challenging the power system behind the jokes. These comments questioned both the appropriateness of the enjoyment felt for the television programme fragments and the right of those producing the programmes to direct the laughter to their chosen object. The following two comments serve as an example:

— I am amused by those who’re laughing. What are they laughing at? That our salaries in Belarus are low? HA-HA-HA! That the country is governed by a petty tyrant? HA-HA-HA! Our neighbours are laughing at us and we’re laughing at ourselves together with them (Evgenij Vaganovich Petrosyan, 20 April 2013).

— [Urgant, the Russian talk show host] knows perfectly what one is allowed to say and what one isn’t. Don’t buy his jokes; he is there exactly for this. Luka [Lukashenka] can be teased […] but [Urgant] doesn’t touch the Russian assholes (Konstantin, 2 March 2013).

The latter quote is instructive also in that politics and power relationships are seen to be part and parcel of any media product. Both of the quotes, however, are representative of the comments in the sample overall in that they challenge Russian media politics for its role in enabling the kind of humorous representations of Lukashenka as protested against here, while at the same time pointing to blind spots in the Russian-made humour. The main discursive strategy relied on by those critical of that humour in this study was to construct an analogy, first, between Russian and Belarusian media in terms of their servility toward official state power and lack of free-
dom of expression and independence of thought, and, second, between Medvedev/Putin and Lukashenka in terms of the kind of political systems they have built. The following quotes from Belarusian online comments provide good examples of this:

— How brave. This is like back in the Brezhnev era on Red Square shouting »Down with Reagan!« But your own Medveput [Medvedev-Putin] is completely untouchable (»Bekish«, 9 May 2012).

— I’m not a fan of Luka [Lukashenka], but it’d be more in order for the Muscovites to mock their own man Putomedved [Putin-Medvedev]. But they can’t do that, I’m ready to bet (»aaa«, 16 November 2009).

— Completely agree. The jokes on Putomedved are a taboo on Russian TV (»Raman«, 16 November 2009).

— Isn’t it just a big joke how things are in Russia? Two men take turns in eating the food from the people’s plate and billions are spent on prostitution and debauchery (»Inokentij«, 25 October 2010).

— Two thievish clans: one is in our country, the other – in the Kremlin. All they do is thievery. They, bastards, rob their own people (»Yadviga«, 2 January 2013).

The legitimacy of Russian media representations of Belarus was also questioned in other ways. The silence about poverty in Russia’s small towns and villages could be pointed out, Russia’s direct support to the Belarusian state and its interest in preserving the country’s state system unchanged was often noted, and the media and political relationships in Russia were frequently described as corrupt (characterized by political control, clientelism, and bought-and-sold loyalty). All such comments, notably, came from explicitly anti-Russian positions critiquing the Russian state. »With such a friend you don’t need an enemy«, concluded one commenter, for instance, after bringing up the financial support received by Lukashenka from the Russian government. The comments killing the joy of humour thus issued from a critical attitude towards the political system in Russia. When the object of the discussions and emotional investments moved away from the Russian humorous representations of Lukashenka and the feeling subjects themselves to Russian (media) politics, the hierarchical power relations between the two countries underpinning these representations became problematized.

Finally, I will discuss how the image of Russia and its geopolitical interests was constructed in the comments. In
addition to what has already been stated about the subject, two further interpretations of Russian political motivations for mocking Lukashenka were proposed by commenters in the sample. Firstly, several Belarusian commenters suggested that the ongoing production of humorous representations of Lukashenka was a warning signal targeted to him, in response to his efforts to improve his relationships with the European Union (especially before 2010). In this interpretation, the humorous Russian representations of Lukashenka were seen as not being about any direct criticism of his politics, but merely a sign of the very high dependence of the Russian and Belarusian regimes on each other. Secondly, the choice of this particular object (Lukashenka and Belarus) for media humour was considered a Russian strategy for diverting ordinary Russians’ attention away from the country’s own problems. In the comments, Russia was discursively defined using the terminology of poverty, corruption, social and economic disparity, fear of ordinary citizens, and absence of justice and freedom. The following quotations offer examples of this:

—I’ve started to wonder why Russia, after being silent for some time, suddenly remembered Lukashenka again. My conclusion is that Moscow wants to warn him: you are looking in the wrong direction; you are searching for help in wrong places (»Rubtsov Mikhail Yur’evich«, 26 October 2011).

—Moscow is encircled by NATO, in every direction; therefore they are going to support Lu [Lukashenka] no matter what…and give money no matter what. Just so there won’t be NATO tanks rolling in towards Smolensk. This how the Russians look at it (»dsdasaknhlkml«, 30 May 2011).

—For »Mother of God, Chase Putin Out«, two years in prison for mothers of small children. Is that a free country? For defacing the fence of governor Tkachyov who built a dacha for himself in a national park… a three-year suspended sentence… Is that a free country? (»Astrakhanka«, 2 January 2013).

Comments like these challenge the image of Russia as a safe, fair and advanced country as suggested by the jokes contrasting Lukashenka and Belarus with the Russian leadership and Russia. In addition, the notion of Russian financial superiority, in particular, was constantly questioned by commenters, with the kind of differences the video clips claimed to be there between the two countries regularly downplayed. Interestingly, only this type of comments received attention from viewers.
openly identifying themselves as Russian. These, in turn, went on to argue against any attempts to find fault with Russian economics or politics, claiming all speculations about poverty in their country to be unfounded. They also defended the right of Russian television channels to produce cartoons and jokes about Lukashenka, asking why Belarusians did not for their part produce their own satire about Russia.

This way, moving from laughter and sympathy for the implied message in the visual representations (unequal power relationship between Belarus and Russia) to the position of a sorry and ashamed subject (whether Lukashenka or the entire nation), the online discussions created a specific space for critical interpretations of Russian television humour about the Belarusian president Lukashenka. While, in due course, these interpretations moved beyond any initial criticism of Lukashenka, there was, however, no attempt to defend him, either. At the same time, the critical comments posted were heterogeneous in terms of their functions and rhetorical tools. Some of them ventured alternative imaginings of Belarus in its highly particular geopolitical settings as a neighbour to Russia. What is interesting here, however, is that even these comments did not end up challenging the dominant (in Russia), dichotomous representation of world politics. In them, Belarus (because of Lukashenka’s politics) was portrayed as trapped in its dependency on Russia, a condition, to be sure, that the commenters in the charter97.org site’s audience would rather have wanted to change. Besides this dichotomous view, another blindly accepted framework among the commenters was one that resulted in a gendered imagination of politics. The representation of politics as a personal accomplishment of male leaders – Putin/Medvedev and Lukashenka – was not challenged in the comments.

**CONCLUSION**

As the analysis presented in this paper shows, focus on emotions can offer insights into how the work of humour in creating hierarchies and making claims for power and superiority may be challenged. Paying attention to the process of reception in this study helped research the subversive potentials of humour, even where its accompanying visual representations and, indeed, actual content, preserved the normative order intact. Unlaughter and killjoy reactions by online commenters were my way of identifying, on the one hand, signs of marginalization and othering and, on the other hand, sites of possible interventions and critical reflection on the politics of humour. The role of the Internet in helping actors overcome geographical boundaries separating media audiences and engage in the monolithic media politics of repressive states also became evident. It should, however be noted that the critical potential associated
Alena Minchenia, »Killjoy and the Politics of Laughter«

with the reception process was to a large extent premised on
the de-contextualization of humour and the particular charac-
teristics of the Internet audience (e.g. its oppositional political
views, interests to politics, etc.). The discussions and debates
examined in this study, moreover, appear extremely topical for
our world today, given the increasingly imperialist tendencies
we are currently witnessing as affecting the Eastern European
region, including war in Eastern Ukraine, and in light of the
potential, identified by many, of humour and satire to evoke
even physically violent responses (as in the case of the tragic
events in Paris and Copenhagen in 2015, and, earlier, the reac-
tions to the publication of the Muhammad cartoons in a Danish
newspaper in 2005).

The recurrent appearance of certain type of entries on char-
ter97.org over the period of five years provides a salient exam-
ple of how the object of emotion circulates over time. This
process of repetition features in emotional dynamics – as
Ahmed puts it: »the more signs circulate the more affective they
become«. The emotional reactions provoked by the censured
Russian jokes varied, ranging from simple amusement and
expressions of melancholy submission to openly and deliber-
ately anti-Russian sentiments. Both the jokes themselves and
the process in which their messages were received ultimately
caused the object of the humour to expand. While the original
target of the Russian television humour was Lukashenka, in the
end it was seen to be Belarusians in general. At the same time,
while Russian media representations kept silent about Russia’s
own geopolitical interests in Belarus, the online comments were
to a notable extent preoccupied with denouncing them. Accord-
ingly, as no comments at all were put forth in defence of Luka-
shenka, one might conjecture that the decisive emotional trigger
for the majority of the posters was not any perceived unfair
portrayal of Lukashenka as such, but the unequal power posi-
tion of those identified as the producers behind these portray-
als: Russian media and Russian politicians.

At the same time as they were able to express and sustain
their critique of Russia’s corrupt political class and political
system and its financial stranglehold on Belarus, the comment-
ers on charter97.org came to reproduce and perpetuate a
simplified image of a bipolar world, one in which their country
was caught between a strong but autocratic and badly behav-
ing Russia in the east and a free, democratic, and liberally
minded Europe in the west. Interestingly, though, while this
contrast was always implied, it was never openly articulated.
The same dichotomy – indeed, an irreconcilable opposition –
between Russia and Europe also underpinned the visual
representations of the video clips themselves. This blind
acceptance of an inherited (but today largely outdated) way of
looking at the world is what appears to continue to mark the
geopolitical imagination in the region still in our time. In this respect my contribution as a researcher in this study is also to reveal the limit of the critical potential of unlaughter by pointing out both the normativity of a bipolar imagination of the world and the gendered order of the politics in Eastern Europe. The same imagination, when addressing politics in general, presents it all as strictly «men’s work», with major blind spots about class and gender privileges, reproduced in both the humorous portrayals of Lukashenka as well as in the viewer comments to these portrayals.

ENDNOTES

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1 It is not possible to point out who directly is responsible for censorship in Belarus as it is closed information. In order to edit Russian TV-programes the Belarusian authorities use the time differences between different regions in Russia and Belarus, so they record the broadcasting for the eastern part of Russia that happens several hours earlier.

2 This was the third year of Lukashenka’s presidency. On 26 November 1996, on the basis of a referendum not recognized, among others, by OSCE, the European Council, and the EU, the country’s constitution was significantly amended to expand the power of the president.


6 Ibid.,


9 Mikhail M. Bakhtin: The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays (Austin, 1981); see also Klumbyte: »Political intimacy«, 658.


12 Pearce and Hajizada: »No laughing matter«.


14 Tsakona and Popa: »Humour in politics and the politics of humour«.

15 See, e.g., Elena Vartanova: Postsovetskie Transformatsii Rossiyiskikh SMI i Zhurnalizma [Post-Soviet Transformation of Russian Media and Journalism] (Moscow, 2013).


17 Pertti Alasutari (ed.): Rethinking the Media Audience: The New Agenda (London, 1999).


20 Ibid., 379.

21 This might be explained, at least in part, by the changes that Belarusian television channels underwent in 2008–2013 in developing their own content, which led to a decrease in the number of Russian materials broadcast. Interestingly, although Projectorparishilton, one of the constant headaches for the Belarusian censors, was simply closed in 2012, in 2011 a new Belarusian television programme Klub redaktorov (»Edi-
tors’ Club) was launched. The new programme openly follows the format of its Russian predecessor, the Projectorparishilton, but, as expected, chooses other targets for its humour.

22 For comparison, 21 out of the total of 54 entries on the current (at the time of this writing) main page of charter97.org have no comments at all to them, while the rest of the entries have between 2 and 41 comments to them.


25 E.g., What? Where? When? (Mul’tlichnosti, episode 37); The Voice (Mul’tlichnosti, episode 42); Who Would Like to Be a Millionaire? (Mul’tlichnosti, episode 4).


27 Interestingly, this episode was aired just before the 2010 presidential elections in Belarus, a period when some notable EU politicians such as the foreign ministers of Germany and Poland, Guido Westerwelle and Radoslav Sikorski, came to Minsk to meet Lukashenka in person and promise significant financial support for the country in case the elections would be free and democratic.


30 This was the date of the fourth presidential elections in Belarus that saw severe police violence towards peaceful political protesters.


36 Ibid.

37 A reference to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, a European state from the 13th century until 1795 that, at its heyday, comprised the territory of contemporary Belarus, Lithuania, Ukraine, and parts of Russia and forms an important histori-
cal reference point to Belarusian oppositional intellectuals in their work in imagining their nation.
39 Batska is Belarusian for »father« and a popular nickname for Lukashenka, conveying his patriarchal stance and attitude towards the Belarusian people.
45 Ibid.
50 A Russian town on the border of Belarus.
52 A reference to a performance-prayer by the feminist punk rock protest group Pussy Riot in Moscow’s Cathedral of Christ the Savior and the subsequent imprisonment of two members of the group.
53 Alexander Tkachyov, governor of the Krasnodar region at the time. Yevgeny Vitishko, an environmental activist, allegedly spray-painted »This Is Our Forest« and »Sanya Is a Thief« on an illegally erected fence on protected lands, wanting to attract attention to rare pine trees being cut down in the area to make room for a palatial summer home there for Tkachyov. Vitishko’s suspended sentence was later upgraded to an unconditional three-year prison sentence.
Linn Alenius Wallin & Klara Goedecke, »With a little help from my friends. Gender and intimacy in two friendship research projects«

ABSTRACT
Friendship is an undertheorized but increasingly important relationship in late modernity. In this article, the authors present findings from two ongoing research projects about friendship, gender and age in contemporary Sweden. They argue that discourses about gender and friendship are highly relevant for how friendship is conceptualized both among men and women, but that culturally ingrained conceptions of men’s inability and women’s capacity to be close friends ought to be problematized further, from feminist perspectives. Furthermore, they discuss friendship practices, problematizing the frequent equation of friendship and intimate dialogues, which are important but may overshadow other friendship practices, like various kinds of support. The authors show that such support is negotiated in relation to ideas of ideal friendship, permeated by reciprocity and equality, and call for further feminist research about friendship, arguing that a feminist perspective can destabilize gendered dichotomies and contribute to problematizing power relations, vulnerabilities and exclusions in friendships.

Linn Alenius Wallin obtained a master's degree in gender studies from Lund University, Sweden, in 2015. Her master thesis analyzed intimate friendships between older women in Sweden with regard to the meaning of friendship in a life-perspective, focusing on reciprocity, narrative, intersubjectivity, and experience of the self.

Klara Goedecke is a PhD student in gender studies at Uppsala University, Sweden. The subject of her doctoral project is friendship between men in contemporary Sweden, and she explores negotiations regarding subjectivity, intimacy, vulnerability, touch, homoeroticism, and homophobia in men’s friendships with men.

Keywords: dialogue, »disclosing intimacy«, feminism, friendship, gender, intimacy, men’s friendships, older women’s friendships, reciprocity

http://lir.gu.se/LIRJ
Gender and intimacy in two friendship research projects

Friendships of many kinds are often seen as important aspects of a full, happy and healthy life, while loneliness and social isolation are seen as negative or even shameful. Friendship is emotionally similar to romantic relationships, although mostly considered to be platonic, but the exact meaning of it is notoriously hard to pinpoint. However, friendship has been argued to be of increasing importance in late modernity, albeit undertheorized. We presented our respective ongoing research projects about friendship at the symposium Exploring affect: Love, held at the University of Gothenburg in the spring of 2015. Our projects concerned different groups: Goedecke’s interviewees were middle-class, middle-aged men, while Alenius Wallin’s interviewees were elderly women from different socioeconomic backgrounds. When cross-examining our empirical materials, patterns began to emerge, leading to fruitful discussions about friendship in contemporary Sweden. In this article, we introduce some themes from our respective research projects, arguing that more Swedish, feminist research on friendship is needed. We focus on how friendship is given meaning in relation to gender, (hetero)sexuality and age, investigating which gendered discourses about friendship are discussed by our interviewees, and how same-sex and cross-sex friendships are described. We also discuss friendship practices like conducting dialogues and exchanging support, and how these practices are made meaningful in relation to ideals of reciprocal and equal friendship.

In discussions about friendship, notions of »true«, »real« or »pure« friendships have often been taken as points of departure. Friendship has been described as an ungoverned relationship »between two free, independent individuals and a meeting of equals«, »unfettered by any selfish or instrumental concerns«. These idealized ideas of friendship have been heavily critiqued for being generalizing, for creating hierarchies between relationships and for disregarding many factors that structure intimacy and friendship. Lynn Jamieson, for instance, argues that conversations are overemphasized when discussing friendship, resulting in normative ideas about what she calls »disclosing intimacy«. Instead, she argues that a degree of depending upon and needing the other are important aspects of
intimate relationships. In other research, it is emphasized that friendships are structured by various societal power relations, such as class, race, place (urban/rural), age, sexuality and gender. Friendships are not detached from concrete living conditions, like financial resources, available leisure time, family circumstances, employment, retirement and health. Friendship can also include downsides, like betrayal, loneliness, and, as Jamieson remarks, personal relationships can also be crucial in maintaining social divisions and providing training in hatred, dominance and submission. Sasha Roseneil and Shelley Budgeon, like Jamieson, emphasize material needs and dependence, arguing that care and intimacy often take place within friendships, outside of the family and the heterosexual couple. Sometimes, friendship is seen as complementary to normative heterosexual romantic relationships, but friendship can also be considered to expand and queer the nuclear family, especially among LGBT people. Friendships, kinship and romantic relationships, we argue, become meaningful when compared and contrasted against each other, making negotiations of their far from clear-cut lines of demarcation an interesting and important subject of study.

Emphasis has often been placed on differences between men’s and women’s friendships. Since the mid-20th century, women have been seen as better at upholding close relationships than men, whose friendships have tended to be seen as shallow and permeated by competition and homophobia. This has led some researchers to argue that men’s friendships are judged by a female norm, permeated by conversation, intimate knowledge about the other and exposure of the self. Instead, these scholars argue, men’s intimacy should be characterized as “intimacy in the doing” or “covert intimacy” and thus as different from female intimacy. We argue that this dichotomous and heteronormative view of friendship and intimacy carries several gendered presuppositions, not allowing for subtle variations in relationships.

In feminist discussions about friendship and gender, women’s friendships have generally been regarded as positive and politically important, while men’s same-sex friendships have been seen in a more ambivalent light. On the one hand, men’s same-sex friendships have been regarded as arenas where male privilege, sexism and homophobia are (re)produced. On the other hand, they have been seen as promising to the feminist movement, as relations where new, caring and emotional masculine positions can be developed. We argue that friendship between all genders should be studied from feminist perspectives, in order to highlight power relations within and around the relationships. While gender differences regarding friendship are discernible, we argue that these are subtle and should be seen as influenced by constructions of gender in
society. Expectations of, and to some extent, practices, in men’s and women’s friendships can differ; women are frequently seen as experts of friendship and intimacy, and as investing a great deal in relationships, while ideas of autonomy, stoicism and non-emotionality are central to dominant constructions of masculinity, which affect men’s friendships. For instance, both men and women have higher expectations of women’s loyalty, willingness to listen and ability to keep secrets, qualities associated with Jamieson’s »disclosing intimacy«. We argue that intimacy should be studied as a multifaceted phenomenon, intersected by various societal and discursive categorizations, rather than possible to sort into two gendered, neat categories.

METHOD AND MATERIAL

As mentioned above, this article takes two research projects as its point of departure. Both projects were based on interviews, conducted during 2014 in different parts of southern Sweden. All interviewees volunteered to participate. Alenius Wallin’s interviews were conducted individually, with ten women, aged seventy to eighty-five. All described themselves as heterosexual, and managed their daily life without support. Goedecke’s interviewees were middle class, well-educated men, aged twenty-five to forty-nine, describing themselves as heterosexual or »mainly« heterosexual (three interviewees). Twelve men were interviewed individually and eight in pairs (where the interviewees were friends with each other). All interviewees were white and spoke Swedish without »foreign« accents; one spoke about having migrated to Sweden as a child. Both our approaches focused mainly on same-sex friendships, even though cross-sex friendships came up occasionally. Alenius Wallin’s approach was explicitly focused on friendships over the life course, but the meaning of friendship, friendship practices and friendship and gender were discussed during both authors’ interviews.

We see the interview situation as a site for not so much reporting as producing knowledge about friendships, and suggest that emphasizing performativity and how friendship is talked about in relation to norms can be fruitful in the studies of friendships. When using interviews, the researcher has to be aware about her own role in the interview situation and about the power differential when it comes to controlling the analysis. This means that listening closely, respectfully and reflexively to the interviewees is important.

Working with two empirical materials, collected independently, poses challenges. Since we, for ethical reasons, have not read each other’s interviews, we have had to iron out our interpretations in conversations and in our mutual writing processes. Our frequent discussions about our respective
interviews have been analytically fruitful, and forced us to rethink our theoretical and analytical stances. Our theoretical approaches were initially slightly different, as were the layouts of our interviews. For the purposes of this article, we use Jamieson as main theoretical inspiration, and address some themes that emerged in both our projects. Our research shows both complexities and differences among the differently aged and gendered interviewees, but it should not be seen as a comparison of the friendships of two distinct groups. Instead, it is an attempt to highlight the complexities of friendships in relation to various (gendered) ideas about what friendship is or should be. The article is divided into two empirical parts. First we discuss gender and friendship as well as same-sex and cross-sex friendship; secondly, friendship practices, such as intimate dialogues, are analysed together with how friendships come to matter.

NEGOTIATING GENDERED FRIENDSHIP

The ideas of gender differences in (same-sex) friendships, mentioned above, do not exist solely within the context of research, but permeate popular accounts of friendship as well. This became evident during all our interviews. Goedecke’s male interviewees repeatedly drew on discourses about men’s friendships as lacking, shallow and permeated by stoicism, non-emotionality, and competition. Many of the men saw this as negative and tried to distance themselves from it during the interviews, mainly by positioning themselves as another type of man, aware and critical of stereotypically masculine friendship behaviour. One of the interviewees, Robert, argues that most men are emotionally handicapped and not able to connect emotionally with other men. He longs for a type of friendship that he has not yet experienced with a man:

Un fortunately, I have not been able to hang out with my male friends in the way I want to hang out with someone, and it’s like, »what is it that you long for?« Well, I long to be able to be a bit weak … without feeling that I make my friend very uncomfortable. I understand it, because I can feel that discomfort myself [...] When I look at the girl-friends I’ve had and look at their friendships. God, they call their best friend and cry for hours, it’s fantastic! Such a relief! »Why do you feel so good?« Well, she has cried for an hour! To someone who has comforted her for an hour and said that everything is going to be alright, shall I come over, we can have a cup of tea. (Robert, individual interview)\(^{23}\)

With a friend, Robert argues, one should be able to show one’s weakness and sadness, and be listened to and comforted, which is common in Robert’s girlfriend’s friendships. While Robert
misses close male friends, some other male interviewees claim to have found them. Tomas and Stefan’s friendship is, they argue, a close and emotional one, involving much conversation, not least about their own relationship, which they feel makes their friendship strong and unlikely to break.

Stefan and Tomas argue that their take on friendship is unique and differs a great deal from how men typically relate to friendship:

Tomas: I wanted to tell you [the interviewer] about Stefan, and our relationship because I like him so much and he has meant so much to me... And in a project such as yours, I thought, that must be great! I thought, I didn’t know if I am right, but I thought that our relationship, just like falling in love, is unique... This must be so special, our relationship must be really unique you know [laughter]

Interviewer: I don’t know yet

Tomas: Well, this is not how other guys hang out.

(Stefan & Tomas, pair interview)

Their friendship, Tomas says, is special, not only to themselves, but compared to how other guys relate to each other. Robert, Stefan and Tomas agree that men in general do not know how to build or maintain good friendships. Men’s relationships are shallow and do not allow weakness, but while Stefan and Tomas claim to have found each other – against all odds – Robert longs for and misses friendship with men. They all, together with many of the other male interviewees, claim to be able to recognise and value close, emotional friendship, which sets them apart from other guys. These are seen as incapable of having, and without strategies for creating, close friendships. Women, by contrast, are described as automatically knowledgeable when it comes to friendships and closeness, a theme discernible in Alenius Wallin’s interviews as well. The interviewee Karla tells us that the strange thing is that men have very few contacts. They do not have the kind of friendship relations that we women have, while Stina says: I do not think men find it easy to talk about their innermost [feelings and thoughts] or admit their weaknesses [...] sometimes I think I’ve had serious conversations, sincere and deep, with some man, incidentally. By chance. To share weakness and to show trust makes the friendship feel and appear authentic, qualities which are missing in relationships with men, the women argue.

Some of the female interviewees argue that the perceived differences when it comes to friendship shape women’s and men’s lives in different ways:

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My experience is that women have many friends, and acquire, most women, of course not all, but most women acquire many friends over the years, especially compared
to men, if one generalizes. So you can see it quite clearly. And I know that many women have told me about… if there is a divorce or if the woman dies, the man becomes very vulnerable because he doesn’t have these friends. And friends for women can be very close friends, but there is also a wide circle of friends where you always have someone available, if you want to [reach out]. I think that is, if one should generalize, if one should distinguish between male and female. And I think it is because women are more likely to talk about their problems, we are more open. (Gunhild)

Gunhild expects women to be emotionally and verbally open, and sees intimate dialogues as prerequisites of friendship, thus drawing upon the discourse of “disclosing intimacy”. This makes women, or at least women who are comfortable with open-hearted conversations, less vulnerable in times of crisis. However, introvert women, who do not live up to the expectations of “disclosing intimacy”, may become even more vulnerable in corresponding circumstances.

It is clear that same-sex friendships are the point of reference in the interviews, but cross-sex friendships are mentioned briefly in both authors’ respective materials. The female interviewees argue that men are never as open and willing to talk about problems or feelings, which makes the women experience friendship with men as shallow. A few of the female interviewees also voice the concern that other people’s expectations of sexual attraction often complicate cross-sex friendships, even when the friendship is platonic. Some of the male interviewees – who described themselves as heterosexual or “mainly” heterosexual – argue that sexual attraction will always get in the way of cross-sex friendship. Others refute this idea vehemently, arguing that it is based on sexist and stereotypic ideas about masculinity and men’s constant sexual prowess. This latter category of men often have several close female friends, with whom they argue it is easier to talk about feelings and “be oneself”. While talking about same-sex and cross-sex friendships, the interviewees refer to discourses about men’s difficulties and women’s automatic knowledge of friendship. Sexual attraction, obviously seen as problematic and out of place in friendship, is mainly brought up with regard to cross-sex friendship and is not seen as a threat in same-sex relations to the same extent. Many of the women were visibly surprised by questions about love and sexual attraction to female friends, while many of the men had reflected upon homophobia in men’s friendships. Here it is evident that ideas of friendship as platonic as well as heteronormativity influence the interviewees’ views on friendship.

All in all, the interviewees discussed, referred to, refuted and
negotiated several well-known discourses about friendship, gender and sexuality. There emerged a consensus that men in general are less skilled at developing close, emotional relationships, where weakness can be shown and confidences shared. Women, by contrast, were seen to possess these skills as it were naturally. In research, these inferences have often been related to dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity, where masculinities are connected to stoicism, autonomy, homophobia and a reluctance to talk about feelings or weaknesses. This would lead to the development of different friendships among men than among women, who are encouraged to relate to others, emotionally and socially. However, our interviewees seem to have similar ideas about ideal friendships; namely a close relationship permeated by mutual confiding, comforting, supporting and sharing of experiences.

At first glance, this shared ideal would suggest that the group of researchers arguing that a feminized ideal of intimacy permeates ideas about friendships, disqualifying men’s friendships, are correct. In this research, it is often argued that men’s and women’s intimacies are essentially different and should be judged by different standards, or should be seen as comrade-ship and friendship respectively. Instead of using such a dichotomous, essentializing and heteronormative view of gender and friendship, we suggest that intimacy and friendship should be seen not in isolation from dominant constructions of gender, but as more or less available and intelligible to different people. Taking our cue from Michael Messner, we argue that sorting intimacies into »feminine« or »masculine« ones is less relevant than asking feminist questions about how friendships are organized and given meaning. These feminist questions include not only what consequences men’s friendships have for attitudes towards women (which is Messner’s main concern) but also wider questions about understanding how gender categories, sexualities, power relations and the organization of intimacy in society are affected or challenged through friendships. Feminist questions to friendship, we argue, should also highlight other power relations that affect friendships, like class and age.

Asking feminist questions to the stories of the female interviewees entails understanding in what ways women’s friendship can be seen in terms of solidarities between women, and how friendship can be regarded as an arena where women have competency and agency. Feminists have argued that women’s friendships should be interpreted as close, strengthening, important bonds, at least as important to women as marital or romantic bonds to men. Here, Alenius Wallin’s interviewees value their bonds with other women and seem to feel that they are superior to men when it comes to friendship. Their friendships and their exchange of support (both emotional and mate-
rial, as will be discussed below) can be seen as decentralizing and challenging the heteronormative family as well as questioning (masculinized) ideals of individuality in terms of autonomy and independence. However, bonding between women should not simply be seen as positive and progressive; critical, feminist questions about power relations and exclusions should be asked. There can be inequalities among female friends in that one is more dependent than the other, and friendship may also act as a segregating force, bringing some people together while shutting others out, affecting access to various resources.

The male interviewees do, to some extent, ask feminist questions themselves. When arguing that heteronormativity and upbringing prevent men from forming close relationships with other men, they voice a similar analysis to many feminist researchers. They discuss ideas about men’s inability to form friendships in a reflexive way, arguing that most men, sometimes even the interviewee himself, struggle with this. However, many of the male interviewees position themselves as men who, in contrast to other men, can recognize and value close friendship. They can be interpreted as men having been taken in by the alleged feminist »kidnapping« of the definition of intimacy, but they can also be read as profeminists, critical of »traditional« masculinity and working for change through changing their friendships. However, a feminist questioning of their profeminism shows that their positioning rests on making a contrast between themselves and »other« men. This makes their position seem more modern, aware and profeminist. Research shows that Swedish, equity-oriented masculine positions are often constructed in this way, and it has been observed that this contrasting often draws upon discourses about working-class and immigrant men as less modern and aware, thus reproducing other power relations and categorizations between groups of men. So, on the one hand, their position can be interpreted as an appropriation of a previously feminized arena, an example of ever-changing and flexible constructions of masculinities, upholding gendered, classed, and racial power relations. On the other hand, their longing for idealized intimate friendships can be seen as a shift towards a more intimate version of male friendship, where (what is perceived as) female friendships are seen as ideal. Asking feminist questions to their stories shows that friendship is a political, organizing tool for the men themselves, and should be seen as gender-politically relevant. Further feminist questioning could include the role of homophobia and what consequences their relationships have for women.
Intimacy) are important, but friendship also involves emotional and practical support, assistance and dependence. Friends may provide a supportive network in times of need. They may also live together and structure their lives in relation to each other, in a way that is perhaps more often associated with the family.\textsuperscript{37} In this section, we problematize and scrutinize in which ways friendship is discussed as important among our interviewees. We also continue to ask feminist questions about how gender, age and class influence how friendships are understood.

Intimate dialogues have already been mentioned as important to friendship. The interviewee John argued that he and his old friend knew «everything» about each other. They had frequent, intimate conversations which John explicitly compared to therapy:

«we function as each other’s therapists a little, I think. We can give each other, really, we can be quite ruthless [...] you get an answer from someone you don’t keep any secrets from. As far as I know anyway, I don’t know how many secrets he keeps, but about me ... he knows everything.» (John, individual interview)

John and his friend’s conversations are therapeutic in the sense that nothing is held back, there are no secrets, and even hard truths can be uttered. John argues that such honesty can be harsh, but in the long run it is beneficial and important. The friend’s ability to challenge one’s thinking and broaden the view of the world, of the self and of the situation is also important to the interviewee Rut: «I do not want to be backed up, I want someone who pushes me and says ‘you are wrong’. Or, ‘it’s wrong what you are saying’». Rut tries to be honest to her friends, which is not always appreciated by them, and she wants them to be more honest in their turn. Sharing «privileged knowledge», as Jamieson puts it, is not only done to gain knowledge of the friend’s secrets or hidden experiences – equally important is the knowledge of the friend’s character flaws.\textsuperscript{38} However, a good friend should not tacitly accept one’s unappealing traits, but challenge and question them in order to broaden one’s views and offer different input. This creates a feeling of acceptance, honesty and authenticity. The precarious balancing between being supportive and ruthlessly honest shows that these kinds of conversations are important in multiple ways.

Intimate dialogues are not the only kind of conversation, though. Also important is the everyday chat, which is about sharing information, feelings, experiences and anecdotes from everyday life. Majvor says that «it may be that I’ve seen something on TV, someone fascinating or a good program. And I have...»
to share; I cannot keep things to myself!». This kind of daily contact with friends becomes increasingly important as, when growing older, spouses, beloved relatives and friends die. While the younger, male interviewees also mentioned having this kind of conversations, most of the female interviewees were living alone, which rendered friendship even more important. Like Major points out, it is necessary to share your life with and be important to somebody and to be recognized and listened to in order to make sense out of life.\textsuperscript{39} We argue that one should not underestimate the importance of this kind of conversation to friendship, but also that it must be understood in relation to how the interviewees are situated in terms of class, age and family. Especially in old age, friendship has been shown to be of high importance to keep a sense of subjectivity and a feeling of connectedness to society.\textsuperscript{40} To retire or become widowed may result in new ways of organizing life, which may foster friendships.\textsuperscript{41}

These different kinds of talk may take place while other friendship activities are conducted. Jens argues that although many of his male friends play games or talk about sports, beer-brewing or »some tangible object« when they meet, they often end up talking about more personal subjects: »[the conversation] starts with the passing that [a football player] made to someone, but it ends with your relationship to your brother«. For Ulla and her friends, art functions in a similar way: »when discussing culture there are often so many personal aspects of it too, which develops the conversation even more«. To Jens and Ulla, shared interests function as a frame for intimate conversations. In this way, practical or activity-based aspects of friendship are blended with conversation-based ones, contradicting gendered dichotomies about men’s and women’s friendships as based on talking and doing, respectively. The activities create room for intimacy without requiring it; intimate (and other) conversations can, but do not have to, take place. However, switching between intimate dialogues and every-day chats entails knowing when to say what, and when to be silent, a sensitivity that all do not possess.\textsuperscript{42}

Conversations are vital when it comes to expressing what friendship means in the accounts of our interviewees. This may be due to the sample of interviewees – somebody inclined to participate in an interview may value conversing more than others. In this sense, the interviewees can be seen as drawing upon the discourse of »disclosing intimacy«. However, as Jamieson points out, intimacy is more complex than that, and emphasizing »disclosing intimacy« may obscure material and practical aspects of friendship. Among our interviewees, the women can be interpreted as more strongly committed to a conversation-based view of friendship than the men. The men find the dialogue important, but mention limits to what is
talked about (sex and relationships are examples of off-limit topics) and discuss shared activities, like playing games and working out together, more than the women. Lending support, like visits to hospitals in times of illness and helping with moving and renovating, are also important. Here, as is also suggested in Jens’ quote above, talking and »doings« probably intermingle and cannot be clearly distinguished from each other. One example of practical help among the female interviewees, however, comes from Karla. Some years ago she tried to help her friend get her big house ready for sale:

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Karla: we cleaned and cleared and threw away, but there was much left to do [...] And I said: »you have to ask me, ’cause I am getting older and older. Right now I am as strong as I was three years ago, but we have to deal with it so you can change your life.« But she is depressed. And stuck! So I do not know what to do. [...] [I’ll try to] help her to get away from there, but she is not receptive now. Then I invited her some years ago, on a trip to Berlin for three days. It was nice and she was really eager. But afterwards she fell down [in the depression] again [...] We know each other so well and she has a quick temper (laughs) so when she yells at me, I don’t care.

Interviewer: Yes (we laugh) does it happen often that she yells at you?

Karla: Yes, she has a very short fuse! But the friendship remains. Yes, she is a perfect example of friendship!

(Karla)

Karla tries to support and encourage her friend to change her way of thinking and her living conditions. Their conversations form part of the support, but Karla also supports her friend materially, by buying her a trip and by clearing and cleaning her house. Despite Karla’s example, most of the female interviewees found it difficult to recognize practical, hands-on assistance as part of the friendships when being asked straight questions about it, perhaps due to a desire to understand one’s friendships as equal and reciprocal. Presumably that is why Karla makes the statement of her friend as »a perfect example of friendship« at the end of the quote above.

Britt also brings up questions of reciprocity when talking about some »very lonely« women she knows, who do not have any friends at all. She maintains friendships with them out of compassion, because she is their only social contact. Britt acknowledges the inequality in these relationships, and says that she often feels guilty about these lonely friends. If the friendship should end, the older women are at risk for social isolation, depression, and may even end up in material need. The lack of reciprocity these relationships reveal is interesting
since reciprocity and equality have often been seen as pivotal to friendship. The women’s investment in these apparently unequal friendships can be linked to the socialisation process, where girls are brought up to identify the needs of others and put these before their own. But, to hold a position as strong, or to be the altruistic part in a relationship also offers the women an empowering feeling of being needed.

Discussions about reciprocity were visible also among the male interviewees. Mikael and Joel were interviewed together, and while they agree that helping each other is very important to their relationship, both of them state that they sometimes feel guilty about asking for help: »it becomes like you’re indebted in some way«, Joel says. Both Mikael and Joel’s families live far away, and they rely on each other for practical help more visibly than some of the other male interviewees, who have their families nearby. Their reluctance to ask for help can be seen as a desire to be self-sufficient and independent, which was important to the women too, making their negotiations about which kind of help it was acceptable to give and receive very complex – being a friend is not the same as being a professional care-giver. This distinction was important to uphold, foremost among the elderly women. Voluntariness, maintaining reciprocity and emotional closeness, all seen as vital characteristics of an ideal friendship, were employed in this process. These tensions show that friendship must be further scrutinized from feminist perspectives, highlighting how financial strength, class and presence of family members affect power relations within same-sex friendships.

In this section we have shown how intimate dialogues, everyday talk and material and practical assistance are discussed as important to the interviewees’ friendships. However, practical or material assistance is emphasized less, especially among the female interviewees, even though it seems to take place. This is consistent with Jamieson’s idea about disclosing intimacy as an important ideal when it comes to intimacy, but also with her and Roseneil and Budgeon’s arguments about material help as pivotal to friendship and other intimate relationships. Besides gender, class, age and family situation impact both friendship practices and negotiations about reciprocity, vulnerability and voluntariness in friendship. Among the interviewees who do not have a family nearby or at all, friendship, with its responsibilities and support, has an especially important role. In these cases, the ideals of friendship as completely voluntary and equal are questioned by feelings of responsibility, which stretch further than the practical and material help that Roseneil and Budgeon emphasize, into taking responsibility for others’ feelings of loneliness.
CONCLUSIONS

In this article, we have discussed a number of aspects of our respective research projects regarding friendship and gender, and emphasized the need for more feminist friendship research. Friendship is gendered in that women in general are seen as capable of having close friendships, while men in general are not. The women and men agree that men’s reluctance to show weakness and divulge their innermost feelings pose problems for forming friendships, and some of the men actively try to change this. The interviewees refer to a well-known, 1970s-sprung discourse about men’s and women’s friendships, and make claims that are very similar to research showing that dominant constructions of masculinity, where stoicism and autonomy are important, prevent men from forming close, emotional friendships. The male interviewees themselves claim to have – for men – exceptional friendship skills. They reflexively refer to discourses about masculinity and friendship, but refute and critique this stereotype when it comes to themselves. In a similar way, the female interviewees argue that women have great friendship skills, but still bring up examples of loneliness and problematic friendships among women. Conversations stand out as important to the friendships, while sometimes overshadowing other aspects of friendship. Among the female interviewees, dialogue was used to help and support friends, to encourage them and to relate and situate each other in life, to such an extent that more practical and material aspects of the relationships were relegated to the background. Among the male interviewees, the practical and material aspects of friendship were mentioned more often, but the ideal of friendship as based on intimate conversations also permeated their accounts, and was connected to a critique of »other« men and longing for new ways of conducting friendships between men. Ideals of reciprocity, voluntariness and equality in friendship were negotiated in relation to care and feelings of responsibility towards others.

Ideas about friendship and gender intermingle in the interviewees’ understandings of friendships. Asking feminist questions destabilizes neat, gendered dichotomies and makes it possible to understand power relations, vulnerabilities and exclusions within both men’s and women’s friendships. Friendship may meet the need for solidarity between people, but may also act as a segregating force, including some while excluding others. In both cases, we argue, it should be an object of further study for feminist researchers. To the interviewees, friendships are politically, emotionally and materially important and provide the interviewees with forums where they can receive many kinds of help, support and care, where they can situate and understand themselves and the world better. The role of friendship is negotiated in relation to the interviewee’s and the
friend’s family ties and financial and material resources. The negotiation of the meaning of friendship in relation to, predominantly, family (but also romantic and sexual relationships) further illustrates that friendship should be a subject of interest to feminist scholars, like families have been for the last fifty years. The role of friendship, especially when it comes to material and emotional support, must also be discussed in the light of shifting understandings of the family and the role of the welfare state in late modern Western countries, such as Sweden.

Our respective research projects, read together, show that friendship is negotiated in relation to gender, class and age but also related to ideas about familial and romantic relationships. The complex negotiations about the meaning, role and content of friendship show the need for more feminist attention to the subject of friendship.

ENDNOTES


5 Jamieson: Intimacy, 1.


9 Jamieson: Intimacy, 3.

10 Roseneil & Budgeon: »Cultures of intimacy and care beyond ‘the family’«.


13 Wellman: »Men in networks«.

14 Levy: »Hegemonic complicity, friendship, and comradeship«, 202; Migliaccio: »Men’s friendships«, 227.

15 Historically, friendship has been seen as a male domain, a relationship in which women could not participate properly. Since the seventies, however, women’s friendships have been revalued. Eva Gothlin: »Att synliggöra vänskap – Simone de Beauvoir och Jean-Paul Sartre« in Ingrid Holmquist (ed.): Könsöverskridande vänskap. Om vänskapsrelationer mellan intellektuella kvinnor och män (Halmstad, 2011); Lundgren: Den ofullkomliga vänskapen; Eva Österberg: Vänskap. En lång historia (Stockholm, 2007).


One aspect of interviewing elderly people is that a long life almost invariably includes significant life changes when it comes to aspects like class, living conditions and description of the self and the narration of one’s life. Some of the female interviewees had lived and worked abroad some period of their life, one interviewee’s parents originated from an East-European country, some of the interviewees had gone through marriage, divorces, widowhood and experienced the death of a child, or other processes that makes it difficult for both interviewer and interviewed to put the interviewee into some easily handled category. Lars Tornstam, for instance, has shown that the elderly are often seen as a unitary group, even though their life circumstances and experiences differ considerably. Lars Tornstam: Åldrandets socialpsykologi (Stockholm, 2011).


All names of interviewees have been changed.

Tomas and Stefan were interviewed together. It is important to note that the interaction during the pair interviews was significantly different from that of the individual interviews. In this example, Tomas was trying to make himself intelligible not only to the interviewer but also had to relate to his friend.


Strikwerda & May: »Male friendship and intimacy«; Scott Swain: »Covert intimacy: Closeness in the same-sex friendships of men« in Risman & Schwartz (eds.): Gender in Intimate Relationships: A Microstructural Approach (Belmont, California, 1989); Wellman: »Men in networks«.
28 Jamieson: *Intimacy*; Migliaccio: »Men’s friendships«.
29 Messner: »Like family«, 217.
33 Levy: »Hegemonic complicity, friendship, and comrade-ship«; Migliaccio: »Men’s friendships«.
34 Lukas Gottzén & Rickard Jonsson: »Inledning« in Gottzén & Jonsson (eds.): *Andra män. Maskulinitet, normskapande och jämställdhet* (Malmö, 2012); Marie Nordberg: Jämställdhetens spjutspets?: manliga arbetstagare i kvinnoyrken, jämställdhet, maskulinitet, femininitet och heteronormativitet (Göteborg, 2005).
36 See Goedecke: »Making friends«.
37 Roseneil & Budgeon: »Cultures of intimacy and care beyond ‘the family’«
39 de Vries & Megathlin: »The dimensions and processes«.
42 Lundgren: *Den ofullkomliga vänskapen*.

*Alenius Wallin & Goedecke, ”With a little help from my friends”*


Jamieson: *Intimacy*; Roseneil & Budgeon: »Cultures of intimacy and care beyond ‘the family’«.
Catherine Vulliamy, »Contradiction and Radical Hope: Utopia as Method in the Lived Experience of Love«

ABSTRACT
In this article, I explore the contradictions, tensions and hopefulness of love. Participants in my research shared accounts of love that acknowledged the anguish, loss and pain of love in uneven political worlds marked by patriarchal power structures and heteronormative assumption. At the same time as confronting the difficulty of negotiating love in this context, the accounts continued to express a determined sense of hope about love. I employ a dialectical approach in order to apprehend the paradoxes and tensions inherent to the lived experience of love. As I investigate the meanings and implications of both the contradictions of love, and the hope in love’s potential to transform, I use Ruth Levitas’ concept of utopia as method to show how the radical hope of love emerges directly from the contradictions of love as a means of imagining and creating new social worlds.

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Keywords: dialectics, hope, love, sexuality, utopia

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INTRODUCTION: THE PERSISTENT QUESTION OF LOVE

For centuries, thinkers, writers, artists and scientists from many diverse schools of thought have been poring over the topic of love in its various forms. In more recent decades, we have seen the development of social theory that makes connections between sexuality and marriage and an ideology of romantic love, or romantic love as a new cultural innovation underpinning marriage and family. The last few years have also seen the emergence of what might be termed feminist love studies, in which love takes centre stage as an object of analysis in its own right, as well as recent philosophical work which specifically addresses love.

From a feminist perspective, the relationship between sexuality and love is complex, not least because romantic love has been understood as a mechanism by which socially constructed links between gender and sexuality are reproduced, and therefore by which male power and female subordination are maintained. It has been noted that feminist theory has tended to be reticent to address love on its own terms, rather than reducible to its relationships to, for example, care or labour. Despite this, however, feminist thinking on love reaches back at least two hundred years.

Simone de Beauvoir understood that love has different meanings for men than it does for women, so that under patriarchy, for woman, «to love is to relinquish everything for the benefit of a master». In heterosexual love then, woman becomes complicit in her own subordination, renouncing her own subjectivity and abandoning her self in love so that she can only be made complete through the attention of her lover. This understanding of heterosexual love as a kind of false consciousness which ensures female subordination and subjugation to men has been a key theme in second wave feminist theory on love, sexuality and relationship. It is on the basis of subjectivities constituted through subordination that Firestone argues that love, perhaps even more than childbearing, is the pivot of women’s oppression today. Like de Beauvoir, Firestone recognises that women invest more in love than men, and in so doing, shackle themselves to their own subordination, and undermine their potential for other achievements.
It is important to note that, while feminist theorists have highlighted understandings of love as a source of women’s subjugation, love is also understood, at least potentially, as a source of liberation. Douglas charts diverse feminist approaches to love, and explores the tension between interpretations of love as a foundation of gender oppression, and its possibility as liberation. She points out that, having described love as a foundation of the subordination of women, both de Beauvoir and Firestone identify a potential for non-oppressive love, albeit with differing preconditions. Lowe discusses the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir and Emma Goldman, to highlight that while these writers expose the oppression of women that appears inherent to love and gendered relations, they also look towards a new vision of love and relationship that is rooted in mutual respect, freedom and comradeship. They describe a world in which love might become an enjoyable enrichment of life, rather than the sole aim of being. Lowe argues that these theorists have succeeded in “politicizing love to strip it of its oppressive character”, and have thereby demonstrated that, despite love’s historic position as a source of oppression, it can also be the necessary condition for women’s liberation.

Within contemporary sociological research, love is understood in the context of social structures and relations and the cultural and social contradictions shape social life today. Giddens grasps issues of difference, inequality and potential in relation to love to argue that we are in an emergent world of the “transformation of intimacy”. He sees this world as heralded by the “pure relationship”; rooted in a presumption of relationship equality and emotional and sexual give-and-take, and not restricted to either heterosexuality or monogamy. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim similarly pick up on notions of the potential that love appears to promise, arguing that, perhaps particularly in the context of increasing individualisation in late modernity, it is the potentials of love which secures people’s deep and long-standing attachment to the idea of love. They suggest that in Post-Christian modern societies, love may seem to offer a necessary sense of meaning; where religion told us that there is life after death; love tells us that there is love before death. The question now is whether attachment to love and the human search for meaning can be understood outside of the friction between conceptions of love as oppression and as emancipatory potential. While some feminist writers have articulated a clear understanding of the potential for love to generate conditions of increased equality, they might still consider Giddens’ presumption of equality in relationships as premature at best. For example, Illouz argues that sin conditions of modernity, men have far more sexual and emotional choice than women, and it is this imbalance that
creates emotional domination«. She notes feminist critiques of love, and argues that the sociological significance of love lies in the promotion of intense romantic love and heterosexual marriage as desirable models for adult life and the ways that these ideals shape »not only our behaviour but also our aspirations, hopes, and dreams for happiness«. She also suggests that feminist theory has failed to adequately grapple with the reasons behind love’s powerful influence on women and men. Part of Illouz’s understanding of inequality in relation to love concerns the use of biologically essentialist arguments to explain away and naturalise what are in fact culturally engineered differences between women and men, which reinforce assumptions about men as emotionally inept and women as inherently over-emotional. Gunnarsson attempts to bridge the contradictions between the ways in which women are subordinated to men through love, and the ways in which love might function as an important source of power for women. Employing a dialectical approach to explore why women tend to give more love to men than men give to women, she argues that the creation of a different kind of future relies upon identifying both the possibilities and the limits of the conditions of our social existence. In this respect, she argues that we need to recognise both the reality of women’s sociosexual needs, and the ways in which these needs are currently involved in women’s subordination to men, in order that women might generate new understandings of how their needs might be met without dependency upon men. Both Illouz and Gunnarsson make a compelling challenge to Giddens’ prematurely optimistic pure relationship, however, his analysis might serve as a valuable invitation for women and men to take steps towards the creation of democratic intimacy.

We can see how the contradictions and tensions between theoretical conceptions of love as liberation and as oppression persist in late modernity. These frictions continue to emerge in recent work on love’s political possibilities. Illouz notes love’s capacity to »subvert from within patriarchy« and the political potential of love to transform is present in much recent literature on love, though these arguments have also been subject to critique. Despite de Beauvoir’s bleak analysis, she also describes the possibility of »authentic love« which demands a reversal of the narrative she initially described, so that instead of functioning as a vehicle for a perpetual relation of domination and oppression, love becomes a recognition of and commitment to the integrity and freedom of each person.

This radical potential of love is taken up by Badiou with his defence of love against the sanitising and rationalising discourse of securitization and his understanding of love as a »minimal communism«. Making connections with the »great explosion of experiments in new takes on sexuality and love«
that were part of the events of May ‘68, Badiou argues that revolution is always »met with obsessive reaction« and it is this reactionary response against which love must be defended. For Badiou, it is »love of what is different, is unique, is unrepeatable, unstable and foreign« that can challenge the reactionary »identity cult of repetition«. Horvat takes the connection between love and revolutionary politics further, charting a history of revolutionary events in order to argue that we might understand love as revolution itself. Following Badiou, Horvat describes a »revolutionary duty« to reinvent love and identifies both love and revolution as a kind of dialectics between dynamism (this constant re-invention) and fidelity (to this fatal and unexpected crack in the world). It is easy to see the ways in which this attachment of love to a hopeful revolutionary potential could be seen as embodying the principles of Lauren Berlant’s »cruel optimism«, where individuals make their lives liveable by maintaining attachments that sustain the fantasy of ‘a good life’ even when life has become unliveable; maintaining an attachment to desires or fantasies which are in fact obstacles to flourishing. Berlant asks whether it is possible know for certain the »truth« of a love relation; to know if love is real or if it is »really something else, a passing fancy or a trick someone plays (on herself, on another) in order to sustain a fantasy«? For her, the fantasy stories woven about love provide a heady mix of utopianism and amnesia that enables heterosexuality to be understood as a desire which expresses people’s »true feelings« without ever addressing the institutions and ideologies that police it. However, in keeping with an understanding of the contrary nature of love, and the value, therefore, of a dialectical perspective, we might consider Levitas’ understanding of utopia as method as another way of approaching these questions of »truth«. Levitas argues that utopia is a »provisional, reflexive and dialogic process«; always suspended between the present and the future, always under revision, at the meeting point of the darkness of the lived moment and the flickering light of a better world, for the moment accessible only through an act of imagination.

As Levitas conceives of it, utopia is not an end point, but a movement towards imagining and creating a new and better world. In this sense, utopia involves a processual dialogue in which lack involves a drive to meet that lack, so that absence, lack or longing are not simply passive states, but simultaneously include an impulse to relieve the absence through a process of creating and articulating imagined alternative futures. Berlant’s question of truth or fantasy is
salient, particularly in relation to the failure to address the ideological underpinning of heterosexuality in relation to love, but it may also distract from the questions of what might be generated through an act of fantasy or imagination. Is the enduring attachment to love a fantasy that prevents optimal flourishing? Or could the tension between the fantasy of love and the longing for it function as an energy of radical hope that might drive the utopian method of creating new and better worlds?

‘DOING’ LOVE AND IMAGINING TRANSFORMATIONS

This article sets out to explore some of these tensions in love. I am interested here in the two related questions of whether and how love might generate political transformation. Can we accept the suggestion of Illouz and others that love might have a capacity to »subvert from within«, and if so, what are the mechanisms by which such a transformation might be achieved? Using a dialectical approach, I seek to address and reconcile some of the tensions that emerge within the data between an awareness of love as a mechanism of oppression and a hope for love’s potential as an initiator of political transformation. We might understand how an aspiring hope for love maintains a status quo in which women remain enslaved by patriarchal power structures in which their own subjectivities are consumed in relation to the beloved. In de Beauvoir’s discussion, the love relationship is structured and policed by »the relation of subject/Other and essential/inessential«, establishing a »relation of perpetual female servitude that is fundamentally oppressive to both women and men«.33 However, we can also understand hopefulness in love as a generative action rather than a passive anticipation. Levitas refers to Unger’s notion of the »anticipatory power of hope« in which hope is a »predisposition to action« rather than simply an expectation of pleasure to come; hope »instantiates a conceived future rather than merely looking to it«.34 In this respect, I show how positions which appear contradictory or oppositional, may yet emerge in balance, and that in fact we might understand that the oppositions themselves can function as a harmonising and creative force in the lives of people living, experiencing and ‘doing’ love.

THE STUDY

The material discussed here is drawn from a combination of individual semi-structured interviews and small group discussions. In-depth interviews were conducted with twenty-one participants, and three small group discussions involved a total of seventeen people. A breakdown of gender identity, sexuality, age and education of participations can be found in Appendix 1. With just four exceptions, participants were white
Seven participants identified themselves as poly-amorous, though others described simultaneous romantic/passionate relationships.

Interview participants were recruited via notices shared with a number of local LGBT organisations and community groups, a local network of relationship therapists, various online forums and message boards around sex, sexuality, relationships and polyamory, and via a Facebook page created specifically for the project. In practice, recruitment happened frequently by word of mouth. Group discussions were recruited via existing networks; a local LGBT society, my university department, and a local voluntary sector resource centre for young unemployed people. Participation was not restricted to any particular group, beyond the stipulation that participants should be over the age of eighteen.

My analysis was rooted in the participants’ own narratives; the content of the stories they chose to tell and the particular shapes and trajectories the stories took. The dual themes of love’s capacity to maintain and reinforce normative formulations of gender, sexuality and their relationship; and hope for love’s transformative potential ran powerfully throughout the data. This was both compelling and something of a surprise; while I might have expected a hope for love, I did not anticipate hearing hope in quite the political, structural and social terms I did. The appearance of inconsistency between these themes invited a dialectical approach to my analysis.

SEXUAL SUBJECTIVITIES

The sexual and love stories shared with me by participants in my research highlighted a shift away from talking in terms of fixed categories of sexual identities and towards thinking about sexual subjectivities as orientation, desire, sexual practice and love. Sherry Ortner argues that subjectivity means not only the ensemble of modes of perception, affect, thought, desire, fear, and so forth that animate acting subjects but also the cultural and social formations that shape, organize, and provoke those modes of affect, thought and so on. Ortner is concerned with the political significance of subjectivity, insisting that the question of subjectivity must be restored to social theory:

I see subjectivity as the basis of ‘agency’, a necessary part of understanding how people (try to) act on the world even as they are acted upon. Agency is not some natural or originary will; it takes shape as specific desires and intentions within a matrix of subjectivity – of (culturally constructed) feelings, thoughts, and meanings.

Participants in my research talked in terms of shared inner worlds of desire, thought and emotion in their talk of love and
sexuality. This created space to describe love and sexuality as a flexible range of responsive, relational practices of affect, perception, desire and experience, as well as body and relationship practices.

The shift in thinking about sexuality in terms that were neither fixed nor necessarily conforming to any particular identity labels is significant. There has been a growing body of work in recent years, particularly in the field of psychology, exploring the notion of sexual fluidity. Although there has been a tendency for this work to focus on female sexuality, there have also been studies which include male sexual fluidity.\footnote{Diamond’s longitudinal study on female sexual fluidity generated significant media coverage on publication, particularly in the United States, that frequently assumed her work implied sexual fluidity as a twenty-first-century phenomenon.\footnote{How- ever Leila Rupp cautions against this assumption, asking how we might think about sexual fluidity »before sex«; that is, before a formal conceptualisation of sexual identity.\footnote{Rupp argues that global and historical exploration of sexual behaviour and desire draws attention to the ways in which the various classifications of sexuality have served to create sexual identities; makes conceptual links between male and female same-sex sexualities; and connects homosexuality with the so-called West, thereby »obscuring the reality of sexual fluidity«.\footnote{While these explorations of sexual fluidity are valuable and welcome, Rupp’s concern about the obfuscation of the lived realities of sexualities and the concealment of the multifarious experiences of desires, orientations and practices, both globally and over time, is well-founded.}}}}

In asking participants to describe their sexuality to me in whatever way they chose, it quickly became apparent that this was not necessarily a simple task. As shown in Appendix 1, a number of participants were unwilling or unable to describe their sexuality in a definite way at all. Those who did attach a particular description to their sexuality very often expressed unease about categorizing their sexuality in a definite way; many qualified the label they used, applying limits such as »well, mostly straight«, or explaining disparities or contradictions between identity, desire and sexual practice. Creating a space in which participants could think and talk about their sexuality in terms beyond identity allowed them to describe their sexuality and sexual lives in ways that considered sexuality in broader terms. This made it possible to describe discontinuities in sexual and relationship practices, as well as to express desire as a sexual and/or affective drive. Beyond identity, sexuality was discussed with me in terms of orientations, desire, emotion, and sexual and relationship practices. Participants described sexual subjectivities in terms of Holland and Leander’s definition of subjectivities as »actors’ thoughts, sentiments and..."
embodied sensibilities, and, especially, their sense of self and self-world relations. – Through this wide frame of reference, participants employed a range of experience, feeling, reflection, memory and cultural reference to express their sexualities. The inclusion of an emotional aspect to sexuality made it easier for participants to explore the connections between their experiences of their sexuality and love. Here follows just a few examples of some of these connections.

Howard, forty one, described his sexuality, without hesitation, as straight, but later talked about sexual and intimately affective experiences with other men. He told me he had felt surprised by the strength of desire he had experienced in a sexual encounter with another man a decade previously; he understood his desire in terms of his lover’s hairless and feminine body and energy, though it was never unclear that his lover was male, and Howard therefore understood it as a homosexual encounter. Howard’s sexual feelings are not dependent upon an explicitly sexual context; it can be a delicious sexual connection when there’s no kissing and we have our clothes on. Similarly, his experiences of sexual desire and love may or may not be connected; he told me that desire can happen with somebody that I don’t feel love for… and vice versa I could fall in love with someone without having that sexual edge. He described a primary orientation, both sexually and relationally, towards women, but also told me that he did not want his heterosexuality to be a rigidly defining identity that left him closed to the possibility of sexual or loving connection with other human beings. Howard recognised, in the abstract, a contradiction between his (hetero)sexual identity and his desire and sexual practise, however he did not experience this as a contradiction. This could be viewed in terms of Howard’s vested interest in his attachment to a heterosexual identity as a means to continue benefitting from women’s love while denying both women and himself the full extent of his sexual self. However, the tension of the inconsistency could also be understood as a foundation for the hope he expresses for a future in which both sex and love are neither dependent upon each other, nor on a particular configuration of bodies and identities.

Sarah, a forty nine year old lesbian, told me that emotional intimacy is an essential part of her sexual experience, and that love and sexuality are not things that she can easily separate because she experiences them as mutually reproductive. Although she had occasionally enjoyed sexual encounters with men, she could not imagine experiencing the same level of emotional intensity with a man that she experiences in her relationships with women. Sarah’s capacity to experience emotional intimacy, and therefore sexual desire, is strongly regulated by the sex of her lover. Intense emotional intimacy
love is the primary source of her sexual desire, however, the emotional trigger for Sarah’s desire and sexual response was not confined to actual experiences; simply thinking and talking abstractly about emotional intensity between women was enough to activate a very physical, sexual response:

That’s what I love about love between women; it’s so intense… I love it, it’s like food for me… So, so deep and so connected and I’m turning myself on now just thinking about it!

In a world in which love and sex are understood as related but distinct, and thought and emotion, the mind and the body are constructed as opposing binaries, Sarah’s experience and practise of love and desire seems to function in a way that bridges and unites these aspects, and yet is simultaneously structured in relation to sex and gender.

Louise, twenty-six, told me that her first experience of both sex and romantic love, when she was fifteen, was with another woman. The experience did not direct her to identify herself as a lesbian. Rather, Louise identified her desire and love for her partner as something that was unconnected to, or transcended, categories of either sexuality or gender: »I think it was more about the person, it just happened… I just thought I’m with this person because I get on with them…« Later, Louise told me that, while she has continued to have sex with women sometimes, she could not imagine seeking a love relationship with a woman. Her current, secure and happy relationship with a man made it hard to conceive of another intimate relationship with anybody else, however she also stressed that a significant factor in her inclination not to enter romantic relationships with women was rooted in her sense that relationships with men were, socially and politically, just easier:

It sounds really bad, but… my family… they’d disown me if I said I was with a woman… I just think it’s not something that I’d be prepared to do, or, I don’t think I’d be emotionally strong enough to take all the shit that comes with being in a gay relationship.

Louise was quite comfortable describing a sexuality that included desire for and sexual practices with women as well as men, however, she made a distinction between sexual encounters and romantic love relationships in a way that aligns with the norms of heterosexuality. She makes a pragmatic choice to confine her romantic relationships to men, and keep her sexual encounters with women under the radar in order to make life liveable in a world that remains structured in ways that are oppressive for people who do not conform to heteronormative
standards. However, at the same time as Louise supresses her sexual and love expression so that she appears to conform, she also describes her sexuality as pansexual. Louise’s sexuality is hidden in plain sight: she relies on heteronormative assumptions about her sexuality to feel safe in the world, particularly in relation to her family; but also makes a point of openly and publicly identifying her sexuality outside of the heteronormative ideal. At the same time, her identification with a sexuality that transcends sex and gender might serve to obscure heteronormative conformity.

Thirty six year old Andrea had identified as exclusively lesbian for most of her adult life. In recent years, however, she has had a number of sexual experiences with men in which she had felt strengths of physical desire that had been shocking to her. Although her sense of herself as a lesbian has powerful political pertinence, inextricably tied to her feminism, she was unable to describe her sexuality in definite terms – when I asked her how she would describe her sexuality, she laughed and said: »Fuck knows!« Andrea’s sexuality emerged through her narrative; a complex web of experience, response and feeling in which sexuality could not possibly be reduced to a single descriptive word. Her experience defied her political and analytical understanding of sexuality, to appear as an experience that was deeply responsive to changing physical, political and emotional worlds. Equally though, regardless of how she might express her sexuality now, or in the future, her sense of herself remained profoundly shaped by a long experience of living as a lesbian in a world shaped by patriarchal and heteronormative power structures.

LOVE STORIES: PAIN AND HOPE

One of the striking things in the accounts of love has been their hopefulness for the possibilities that love might generate for human relating. This is not to suggest that participants talked in terms which ignore the complex difficulties of human relationships, or the unequal power structures that frame experiences of them. Quite the opposite; the politics of gender, patriarchy and heteronormativity were often sharply present. Yet even as women and men have shared experiences of love in which they or their partners have been – physically or metaphorically – violated, abused, hurt or abandoned by their beloveds, they have almost all retained a hopefulness about the possibility of love to generate new ways of relating. It is hope that does not presume the rosy glow of Giddens’ intimate equality and democracy, but which dares to imagine relations that are rooted in freedom, integrity and a sense of transformative potential. The love stories communicate an intimate understanding of a deeply unequal political world in which love must be negotiated alongside a host of risks and threats.
posed by the practical experience of systematic inequality including, but not limited to gender inequality; and the wide-reaching implications for women and men of patriarchal power structures. The oppressive, painful and exploitative nature of love sits alongside a hope for the positive transformational potential it seems to hold, individually and collectively. Many participants articulated a clear need to be an autonomous subject in love; one who is not consumed, dependent, or diminished within the context of a loving union, but who enters love as complete-in-oneself, and retains that integrity whilst simultaneously supporting the integrity of the beloved. To return to Levitas and her determination that utopia is a generative method, rather than a blueprint or outcome, I suggest that employing utopia as method is exactly what participants were doing as they told me their stories.

Thirty-three year old Aiden is the partner of Louise, who I interviewed separately, and his story illustrates the contradictory position of men in heterosexuality. Gunnarsson argues that patriarchal sociosexual structure can be theorized as constituted by dialectical contradictions that create dilemmas not only for the exploited, but for the exploiters too. As Aiden’s story unfolds, so too does the dialectical contradiction between heterosexual men’s exploitation of women, and the ways in which this exploitation simultaneously inhibits the possibility of men’s empowerment and emancipation through love. Aiden described a moment, some years previously, in which he became aware that he had been exploiting women’s love and desire as a means of validating his fragile sense of himself and his own masculinity. He made a particular connection to his being, at the time, in the "incredibly macho" environment of the armed forces, in which "you have to prove that you are strong all the time and that you are alpha male." Part of the army culture about how a man might verify his strength and masculinity – to his colleagues and to himself – was through being very promiscuous, and being seen to treat women badly. Aiden told me:

--- I think at that time sleeping with someone ... proved [to me] that I was wanted or I was desirable or something like that.... And then when I left [the armed forces] I think I had a sort of epiphany and it was, I very much looked at what I was doing and my actions and asked who was I really hurting in all that?

Within this recognition Aiden was also confronted with his denial of his own dependence upon women; while he exploited women’s willingness to offer their desire and love, he was also reliant upon them to achieve integrity and acceptability. In mistreating and exploiting women, Aiden was damaging
himself and preventing his attainment of the evidence he so needed of his »manliness« and the possibility that he could be loveable. He was utterly dependent upon women to give him that sense of himself. Here we can see what Gunnarsson describes as the ontological fragility of men’s power as it is produced within patriarchal sociosexuality. We can also see the ways in which tension and contradiction in love have a potential to generate new harmony: in confronting this contradiction between his exploitation of women and his dependence upon them, Aiden was able to come to a new understanding about the importance of integrity in love, not only for himself, but for those he loves. This new awareness represents a shift towards Badiou’s understanding of love as being essentially about the Two – the creation of a new shared view of the world from the perspective of Two, rather than One.

Badiou’s »Two-Scene« is only possible if the individuals are complete in themselves; a person who only exists as a reflection in the eyes of their lover cannot hope to build a shared world. This is not to suggest that the negotiation of contradictions and the building of shared worlds are simple; Aiden needed time, practice and the loss of a marriage before he was able to enter a relationship in which both he and his current partner feel they are Two complete subjects creating a shared view.

Aiden’s understood the ending of his marriage as resulting from an insurmountable contradiction between his former wife’s view of love and his own. As he saw it, his wife understood love as itself marriage, parenthood and a shared home. His marriage collapsed as he realised that it could have been anyone in that role [of husband and father]… You know, it wasn’t me as a person in that role, it was just that the role needed to be filled.

We can understand this as a simple extension, despite his epiphany, of Aiden’s exploitation of his wife’s love; that she failed to deliver her love as an exploitable resource that could (re)constitute Aiden. In choosing marriage, parenting and a shared home as the receiving objects of her love power, she withdrew an exploitable resource from Aiden. This introduces a further contradiction insofar as it illustrates how the exploitation of women in love relies on women’s freedom to attract, choose, and reject. However, we can also see Aiden in a process of growth in which he was complicit in the collapse of his marriage through his failure to attend to his prior lesson about the strength and power that is generated in the meeting of the Two. Aiden’s marriage was not a shared world, but one in which he was an available body to slot into a pre-imagined role. Neither his need to be loved, nor his wife’s need for a husband, home and children could be fulfilled. However, the exposed
contradictions of love, along with his losses and his longing for love, enable Aiden to imagine love in new terms, and try once again to create love based on his own and Louise’s individual integrity as they meet and build a world in common. So we might understand Badiou’s assertion of love’s power to slice diagonally through the most powerful oppositions and radical separations; if love is essentially about the Two, it can cut through the powerful opposition and radical separation of two distinct beings, not to render them one and the same, but to enable their coming together to create a new worldview.\(^48\)

The hope of love was not boundless; it did not assume that love alone has a capacity to eradicate power differences. It was hope in the possibility that love might enable new ways of living side by side. This hope might be extended to imagining ways in which the political world could be transformed through the interpersonal opportunities that love can enable, but this kind of utopian and large-scale structural change was not presumed. I do not read this as a hopefulness that contradicts itself by lacking ambition, not least because of the ways in which participants talked knowingly and critically of the structural inequalities that frame human lives and the impact on attempts to form relationships, romantic and otherwise. In many ways, hope here was deeply pragmatic; a bottom-up hope that love might make possible the kinds of relationships that make life liveable in an unequal world, alongside hope for the creation of something new and different. The radicalism of this hope lies primarily in its determination to create a liveable space beyond the closely-policed (and sometimes legislated) norms around sexuality and sexual expressions, gender expressions, relationship and family structures. In order to achieve such a thing, there is a need to imagine what good love might mean, and then to imagine what needs to be in place to enable it. Learning how to use the energy of contradiction as a creative and unifying force requires skill and practise, but learning how to imagine and do love better is essential to finding a balance between love’s potentials for both exploitation and emancipation.

The stories I heard describe unequal distributions of power in the social world, the realities of disharmony, inequality, and abuse within relationships, and an understanding that love frequently ends. During a discussion group, a young woman described a prior relationship which had been violently abusive and was challenged by another participant asking whether this relationship was really love. The young woman replied:

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I would like to be able to say that... It would be easier to say ‘now I realise that wasn’t really love’, but I can’t do that. I did love him. It was real, even if it was all wrong... And it’s part of my story... Now, I hope that
when I love again it will be different – I hope that I’ve learned enough to know that love doesn’t have to allow getting battered! ... But I’d be a liar if I said I never really loved him.

She was unwilling to dismiss her emotional experience as counterfeit because of the context of domination and abuse, yet also retained hope for new kinds of future love; using her experience to help reform love. Her hope needed to include her experience; it did not require a dismissal of prior feelings as inauthentic, and did not assume that her experience would – or would not – be repeated. Her prior experience was part of her way forward and her hope for the future. Men were also aware of the context of domination in which their relationships occurred, describing a passionate desire to meet their partners (male and female) as equals. However some, particularly heterosexual men, also recognised the difficulty of meeting as equals in such an uneven social world.

Michael, sixty-five, described how love had sustained him when he and his (female) partner had ceased to be sexual after their first four years together. The couple’s persistence, supportiveness and determination to behave in demonstrably loving ways towards one another enabled them to continue their relationship for a further decade despite Michael’s pain and sadness at the »failures« of their sexual relationship. In a similar way to Aiden, Michael described to me the ways in which feeling loved enables him to feel »real«; »If nobody showed any love for me ... that’s sort of like ... it’d be like not existing«. In this respect, Michael too was both seeking to exploit his partner’s love, and dependent upon her in order to »make him real«. In the context of the cessation of a sexual relationship with his partner he explained:

— This becomes a story about what parts of me are acceptable, which parts aren’t. It’s like somebody could have a conversation with me but if they’re not touching me I can still believe that my body is not properly welcome ... So now my mind might be welcome and my body not.

In an apparent about-turn on Jónasdottír’s argument that men tend to channel their sociosexuality through sex and women through care, Michael’s response to his partner’s withdrawal from expressing her love sexually was a conscious determination that he wanted to continue to love her in ways that helped her to »feel welcome« and »real« regardless. This could be taken as an indication of Michael’s need for affection and validation, and his partner’s willingness to continue offering her love to him, but distinct from Gunnarsson’s outline of the contradictions of heterosexual love, Michael does not lack
awareness of his own need, and nor is his subjectivity constituted on the basis of a denial of that need. Rather Michael strives towards a profound kind of consciousness and self-awareness, without which he can neither be fully present to his lover, nor in himself. In understanding his quest to experience his whole self as loveable, Michael likewise seeks to extend that welcoming to the whole self of his lover. In this way, Michael’s hope is that love might be the mechanism by which both he and his lover might be granted an experience of their own integrity; that being loved gives an assurance that we are welcome in the world on our own terms and as complete beings.

Alice who identified as bisexual and polyamorous, described a hope for love in more political terms. Twenty-six year old Alice talked of the cultural assumptions about, and constructions of, love and relationships that surround us, and the impact of these, particularly on girls and young women:

— I mean, I… think about the fairy-tale weddings and you know, Sleeping Beauty and Cinderella and Beauty and the Beast and things like that… and it [becomes] kinda horrifying when you look at those stories – you know, Cinderella can just be forced to do whatever her family wants; Beauty and the Beast – I’m in love with this abusive man so I’ll stay with him.«

For Alice, polyamorous love offers new possibilities for relationship and sexual freedom in which she does not have to be constrained by imposed norms or expectations of behaviour; it is an aspirational form of loving in which she is able to exchange romantic and sexual affection with many partners, or with a single partner according to her own desires and wishes. Alice felt that the possibility of loving multiple partners was, for her, a more realistic way of loving. It offers a space in which she can move beyond conventional expectations of monogamy and marriage (which she described as the »Disneyfication« of love); beyond compulsory heterosexuality, and towards multiple loves in which she might express a fuller range of her sexual and affective desires and practices. Monogamous, heteronormative love is not something that appears to be either desirable or achievable for Alice. Her hope in love is that it can have meaning and expression that feels realistic in the terms of her personal and political desires, rather than requiring her to conform to a particular set of ideological norms. Her hope acknowledges both the potentials for »failure« and the positive possibilities. She hopes for love to generate the freedom for her to move beyond, or to live outside of, conventional norms and expectations of what love, relationship and sexuality »ought« to look like. It is a hope that is
rooted in her own desire and experience, but which also extends beyond herself in hoping that love might ultimately create opportunities for a world in which love and desire are less confining for all people.

Lesbian-identified Elly, thirty-four, had a slightly different take on a similar view to Alice’s. While Elly was interested in her love relationships being generally monogamous, she shared Alice’s determination for a realistic view of love. Elly was frustrated with the idea that love ought to hope for longevity, and that if it does not, it is somehow a »failure«; she wanted love to make room for growth and change, but also for separation without the notion of »failure« attached:

— You know as much as like sexuality is fluid, your relationships are fluid. It’s a period of time where that is the right thing for you [both] at that time, but people grow, people move on, circumstances change and I think that’s… that’s what’s really difficult; to be with somebody and to grow as a person with that other person and… staying parallel with them.

Like other participants, Elly described the ways that lovers might grow and change in the context of a relationship, alongside a more internal, personal growth. For her, this spelled the potential for love to be finite, but without implying a lack of authenticity:

— I don’t think [lifetime love] is the be all and end all. I think you can love somebody for a period of time, maybe you [continue to] love them after a relationship has finished… It’s like… there are people I can connect with at different times and in different places and feel that love from them and give love to them for that period of time… And that’s ok.

The examples here give an account of the loss, pain and contradictions that are involved in love. At the same time, the broad hopefulness of the accounts is unmistakable, particularly in imagining future love. I will move forward now to consider how we might read this hope for love, and what its implications might be.

CONCLUSION: THE RADICAL HOPE OF LOVE

If we can be certain of nothing else in relation to love, we know that it is paradoxical. Riddled with tension and contradiction, pain and loss, love still retains a powerful hold on the human imagination in contemporary Western society. Lovers and thinkers alike see powerful potential in love, whether that be...
to entrench and maintain subordination, to pave a way for liberation, or trigger the risk and opportunity of revolution. What I want to suggest is that it is inside the contradictions of love that we might find it’s radical hope. It is from the pain and horror of the love de Beauvoir describes initially in *The Second Sex* that an alternative model of love is born, arguably rooted in the same kind of hope for a radical new way of being, loving and relating as I read in my participants’ accounts. De Beauvoir models authentic love as a fundamental equality between the lovers, in which their freedom and their subjectivity are recognised and valued. With freedom as a necessary prerequisite for authentic love, de Beauvoir shows how love might be revolutionized in order to become more compatible with a political and social ideal, enabling the coming-together of two individual, autonomous subjects to form a mutually enriching union. She explains:

—— Authentic love must be founded on reciprocal recognition of two freedoms… they would not mutilate themselves; together they would both reveal values and ends in the world. For each of them, love would be the revelation of self through the gift of self and the enrichment of the universe.

Though hope looms large in the stories I have heard, they understand both the harshly unequal political worlds in which love seeks to flourish, and the pain and discomfort that can be inherent to love. They echo both de Beauvoir’s critical account of the oppressive mechanism of love in gendered relations and her hopeful and radical vision of authentic love; describing the radical hope of love’s capacity to propel the invention of new ways of being, relating and living.

Badiou suggests that love might be conceived of as a »minimal communism«:

—— By »communist« I understand that which makes the held-in-common prevail over selfishness, the collective achievement over private self-interest… we can also say that love is communist in that sense, if one accepts, as I do, that the real subject of love is the becoming of the couple and not the mere satisfaction of the individuals that are its component parts.

The hope expressed in my research seeks a reinvention for love and its dynamics that marries Badiou’s understanding of the collective achievement over private self-interest and de Beauvoir’s concerns with freedom, integrity and authenticity. The accounts are conscious of world-worn ideas about love and the ways it operates, particularly in relation to gender inequality,
hetero- and homo-normativity, and related issues around the presumption of monogamy. In this sense, the focus is on love as a potential generative force, rather than as an internal emotion; the question is not what love is, or how love feels, but what love does – or could do. Keeping in mind Levitas’ insistence that utopia is not a map, blueprint or goal, but a method, we can understand the hope here in terms of an attempt to imagine a world in which love connections are forged and lived freely between human beings. In particular, they imagine a transformation in which love, desire and relationship are not expected to be constrained in relation to particular formations of identity, conventions of practice, or configurations of bodies. It is a hope about the potential for love to support a transformation of social relations that emphasises human connection and collectivism rather than opposition and individualism; freedom and flexibility over constraint and rigidity, and which seeks to incorporate conflict and contradiction rather than engage in a perpetual war of either-or.

Persistent inequalities that are played out in both theoretical descriptions and lived experiences of love do not erase the fundamental significance and driving power of love in people’s lives; in fact many are actively seeking ways to reform love to take greater account of issues around difference and inequality that render some lovers subjects and others objects in the face of love. Despite love’s potential to deceive (as suggested by Berlant’s notion of cruel optimism), and for it to be understood in terms of the individualising and de-politicising discourse of neoliberalism, I read these accounts as a hope that, unconfined, love might take new forms, be deployed in new ways, and make space for flexible subjects in radical new ways. It is not a giddy optimism that we already inhabit the world of Giddens’ democratized love, but an assertion of the importance of love in human life and a buoyant imagining of a template that can acknowledge love’s many contradictions and use them to drive a generative utopian imagination of possibility. It is a hope for the integrity of subjects, acknowledging the confines of uneven political worlds and, after Ortner, the struggle of being actors in the world even as we are acted upon. It is a radical hope that we can love, as de Beauvoir imagined, not in weakness but in strength, not to escape but to find ourselves, not to abase but to assert ourselves, so that love can become, instead of a mortal danger, a source of vibrancy and life.
Appendix 1: Breakdown of gender, sexuality, age and education of participants

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**Catherine Vulliamy, “Contradiction and Radical Hope”**

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**ENDNOTES**


3 See, for example, bell hooks: *Feminism is for Everybody* (Cambridge, 2000); 102; Anna G. Jónasdottir: »Love studies: a (re)new(ed) field of knowledge interests« in Anna G. Jónasdottir and Ann Ferguson (eds.): *Love: A Question for Feminism in the Twenty-first Century* (London, 2014); Gunnarsson: *The Contradictions of Love*, 5. For example, the works of Victoria C. Woodhull and Emma Goldman, writing in the late eighteen hundreds and early nineteen hundreds respectively.


10 Lowe: »Feminism, love and the transformative politics of freedom in the works of Wollstonecraft, Beauvoir, and Goldman«, 204.

11 Lowe: »Feminism, love and the transformative politics of freedom in the works of Wollstonecraft, Beauvoir, and Goldman«, 204, 205.


18 Illouz: Why Love Hurts, 5.
19 Illouz: Why Love Hurts, 245.
22 de Beauvoir: The Second Sex.
23 Badiou: In Praise of Love, 97, 96.
28 Berlant: Desire/Love, 92.
30 Levitas: Utopia as Method, 149.
31 Levitas: Utopia as Method, xiii.
32 Levitas: Utopia as Method, 181.
33 Simone de Beauvoir in Lowe: »Feminism, love and the transformative politics of freedom in the works of Wollstonecraft, Beauvoir, and Goldman«, 198.
34 Levitas: Utopia as Method, 188–189.
35 I believe that this is at least in part a reflection of the demographics of the local area in which I was working (Hull, in the north-east of England). Although some interviews were conducted further afield, via Skype, the significant majority of participants were based in or very near the city of Hull, which has a long history of minimal racial/ethnic diversity by comparison to similar-sized British cities.
37 Ortner: »Subjectivity and cultural critique«, 34.
39 Diamond: *Sexual Fluidity*.
41 Rupp: »Sexual fluidity ’before sex’«, 855.
43 Giddens: *The Transformation of Intimacy*.
45 Gunnarsson: *The Contradictions of Love*, 133.
49 Gunnarsson: *The Contradictions of Love*, 140.
50 de Beauvoir: *The Second Sex*, 678.
51 de Beauvoir: *The Second Sex*, 677.
52 Badiou: *In Praise of Love*, 90.
53 Giddens: *The Transformation of Intimacy*.
54 Ortner: *Subjectivity and Cultural Critique*.
Emma Severinsson, »Freedom or Love? Marriage, single life, and the road to happiness in Swedish 1920s magazines«

ABSTRACT
This article analyses discourses about self-supporting women in Swedish women's magazines in the 1920s, after the attainment of legal equality in marriage and the acquisition of the right to vote. The self-supporting middle class woman was a controversial figure in this context. On the one hand symbolizing freedom and independence, she was on the other hand ridiculed and labelled mannish and unattractive. The article pays special attention to the notions of happiness, freedom, love, and marriage in the material. Depending on how they were coded in relation to each other, they gained different meanings. When happiness was connected to freedom, it was emphasized that a woman could never be happy within marriage; however, when happiness was tied to love, it was claimed that happiness was attainable in marriage. Freedom and marriage were thus incompatible in both discourses. Love was restricted to marriage. The article demonstrates that there was a negotiation around the position of the middle class woman during the 1920s, which in turn led to an expansion of possible identity positions for women.

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Keywords: freedom, happiness, love, marriage, single women, Sweden, women's magazines, 1920s

http://lir.gu.se/LIRJ
FRIHET ELLER KÄRLEK? Äktenskap, singelliv och vägen till lycka i 1920-talets veckopress

Undertecknad 35 år, självförsörjande, självständig kvinna har råkat i en [sic] svår dilemma. Jag har nämligen för en tid sedan blivit bekant med en man, som vill gifta sig med mig. Inte för att jag är kär i honom, men jag högaktar och tycker bra om honom. Hur skall jag göra?

Så inleds en insändare, signerad Vankelmodig ungmö, i vecko-


SYFTE, MATERIAL OCH UTTAGSPUNKTER


Historikern Ulrika Holgersson menar att veckopressen ska ses som en kvarleva av dåtidens förhandlande kring diskurser och erfarenheter, av hur man agerade genus och klasse. I likhet med Holgersson menar jag att veckopressen ger en inblick i dåtida förhandlingar kring vilka genuspositioner som var tänkbara. Genom att ta utgångspunkt i veckopressens komplexa material där en rad röster kommer till tals och bryts mot varandra, både veckotidningarnas skribenter och deras läsares, finns en stor möjlighet att komma åt olika typer av föreställningar och förhandlingar kring till exempel feminitet som är fokus för denna artikel. Litteraturvetaren och pionjären inom svensk veckopressforskning Lisbeth Larsson menar att veckopressen inte vill upplysa eller förändra utan syftar istället till att underhålla. I samma anda framhåller veckopressforskarren Gullan Sköld att man inte kan förvänna sig att veckopressen ska stå på barriärernas och servera läsekretsen radikala budskap som den inte efterfrågar, innebärande till exempelvis ett totalutplånande av skillnaderna mellan könen. Hon hävdar vidare att veckopress inte tar ställning till kontroversiella frågor på grund av kommersiella skäl. Sociologen Anna-Karin Kollind, som undersökt frågespalter i veckopress, argumenterar, att andra sidan, för att veckopressen bör ses som personpolitisk.

Att se veckopress inte tar ställning till kontroversiella frågor. Genom att betrakta veckopressen som politisk ges den också en större historisk betydelse, och här bör man minnas att veckopressen var den offentliga arena som fanns tillgänglig för kvinnor vad gäller personliga och privata frågor.

Utifrån material från veckotidningarna Charme (1921–1933), Svensk Damtidning och Idun (1920–1932) undersöker jag dessa
typer av förhandlingar, för att se vilka möjligheter kvinnor ansågs ha att välja eller välja bort äktenskap. Detta är tre tidskrifter med medelklassens kvinnor som målgrupp. Att undersöka olika veckotidningar är givande för att se vilka förhandlingar som återkommer och vad som kan tänkas skilja sig mellan tidskrifterna. Charme riktar sig till moderna unga kvinnor som främst lever stadsliv. Den har en större fokus på konsumtion och nöjen än andra veckotidningar på marknaden under samma period, och Larsson menar att målgruppen är fria och välbärgade yrkeskvinnor.10 Detta kan dock problematiseras eftersom Charme ofta har ett tilltal också till de kvinnor som inte har något kapital, arbetar på kontor och har svårt att få ekonomin att gå runt. Dessa förväntade läsare tillhör snarare en lägre medelklass. Charme finns på marknaden 1921–1933. Efter 1929 blir kvalitén på såväl papper, illustrationer och texter i tidningen betydligt försämrade. Detta kan förmodligen härledas till den ekonomiska krisen vid tidpunkten. Larsson visar i sin sammanställning över svensk veckopress att det inte var ovanligt att veckotidningar fanns på marknaden i bara några få år – i sammanhanget får Charmes över tio år på marknaden ses som en relativt lång period.11 Idun vände sig vid etableringen 1887 till en bred målgrupp av både konservativa kvinnor och mer frisinnade självförsörjande. Detta förändrades dock under de följande decennierna och det kvinnoemancipatoriska tilltalet blev allt mer framträdande. Detta kan förmodligen härledas till den ekonomiska krisen vid tidpunkten. Larsson visar i sin sammanställning över svensk veckopress att det inte var ovanligt att veckotidningar fanns på marknaden i bara några få år – i sammanhanget får Charmes över tio år på marknaden ses som en relativt lång period.11 Idun vände sig vid etableringen 1887 till en bred målgrupp av både konservativa kvinnor och mer frisinnade självförsörjande. Detta förändrades dock under de följande decennierna och det kvinnoemancipatoriska tilltalet blev allt mer framträdande. Detta kan förmodligen härledas till den ekonomiska krisen vid tidpunkten. Larsson visar i sin sammanställning över svensk veckopress att det inte var ovanligt att veckotidningar fanns på marknaden i bara några få år – i sammanhanget får Charmes över tio år på marknaden ses som en relativt lång period.11 Idun vände sig vid etableringen 1887 till en bred målgrupp av både konservativa kvinnor och mer frisinnade självförsörjande. Detta förändrades dock under de följande decennierna och det kvinnoemancipatoriska tilltalet blev allt mer framträdande. Detta kan förmodligen härledas till den ekonomiska krisen vid tidpunkten. Larsson visar i sin sammanställning över svensk veckopress att det inte var ovanligt att veckotidningar fanns på marknaden i bara några få år – i sammanhanget får Charmes över tio år på marknaden ses som en relativt lång period.11 Idun vände sig vid etableringen 1887 till en bred målgrupp av både konservativa kvinnor och mer frisinnade självförsörjande. Detta förändrades dock under de följande decennierna och det kvinnoemancipatoriska tilltalet blev allt mer framträdande. Detta kan förmodligen härledas till den ekonomiska krisen vid tidpunkten. Larsson visar i sin sammanställning över svensk veckopress att det inte var ovanligt att veckotidningar fanns på marknaden i bara några få år – i sammanhanget får Charmes över tio år på marknaden ses som en relativt lång period.11 Idun vände sig vid etableringen 1887 till en bred målgrupp av både konservativa kvinnor och mer frisinnade självförsörjande. Detta förändrades dock under de följande decennierna och det kvinnoemancipatoriska tilltalet blev allt mer framträdande. Detta kan förmodligen härledas till den ekonomiska krisen vid tidpunkten. Larsson visar i sin sammanställning över svensk veckopress att det inte var ovanligt att veckotidningar fanns på marknaden i bara några få år – i sammanhanget får Charmes över tio år på marknaden ses som en relativt lång period.11 Idun vände sig vid etableringen 1887 till en bred målgrupp av både konservativa kvinnor och mer frisinnade självförsörjande. Detta förändrades dock under de följande decennierna och det kvinnoemancipatoriska tilltalet blev allt mer framträdande. Detta kan förmodligen härledas till den ekonomiska krisen vid tidpunkten. Larsson visar i sin sammanställning över svensk veckopress att det inte var ovanligt att veckotidningar fanns på marknaden i bara några få år – i sammanhanget får Charmes över tio år på marknaden ses som en relativt lång period.11

**BAKGRUND OCH TIDIGARE FÖRSKNING**

1920-talet innebär på många vis en ny start efter första världskriget och samhället präglas av förhoppningar om tillväxt och utveckling. Decenniet inleds också med att ekonomin stärks och med en fortsatt urbanisering och industrialisering. Framtidsstro, modernitet i form av tekniska framsteg och influenser från Amerika präglar det svenska samhället.14 En ny...
typ av moderna unga medelklasskvinnor träder in på arbetsmarknaden, där de bland annat arbetar som maskinskriverskor och kontorister. Detta har kallats en feminiseringsprocess som förändrade arbetsmarknaden. Det fanns inte längre samma resurser som förut i de borgerliga familjerna att försörja de ogifta döttrarna.


Forskare har lyft fram att äktenskapsnormen under 1920-talet omförhandlades i riktning mot det som under 1930-talet kom att omtalas som ett »kamratäktenskap«, där makarna förväntades ha en jämlik relation. Vad som dock inte utforskats i någon högre grad, ämstone inte i en svensk forskningskontext, är de kvinnor som aktivt valde bort äktenskap för att de föredrog att leva som singlar och självförsörjande. De kvinnor som inte ville gifta sig har helt enkelt hamnat i skymundan av de som ville men inte fick möjlighet, trots att det under 1920-talet pågick en diskussion kring de kvinnor som valde att leva som självförsörjande utanför en heterosexuell relation.

Det var den stora andelen ogifta kvinnor som ledde till...


Självförsörjande som begrepp syftade på de kvinnor som själva ansvarade för sin försörjning, och blev till en motpol till de gifta kvinnorna som försörjdes av sina män, liksom till de så kallade hemmadöttrarna som blev försörjda av sina fäder. Under 1920-talet kopplades epitetet självförsörjande ofta samman med specifika yrken så som kontorist och butiksbiträde.

Den australiensiska sociologen Catriona Elder undersöker debatter från 1930-talet om kvinnor som valde att inte gifta sig. Hon lyfter fram att veckopressen ofta kopplade singelkvinnornas liv till mobilitet, nöje och frihet, medan äktenskapet framstod som mer klaustrofobiskt. I två artiklar, en av den norska historikern Tone Hellesund, och en av den australiensiske historikern Katie Holmes, undersöks kvinnor som valt att leva som singlar mellan 1800-talets sista decennier och
fram till 1920. Holmes skriver om hur singelkvinnor hotade den manliga hegemonin genom sin ekonomiska frihet. Hon menar också att singelskap sägs som ett val i feministisk vecko-
press. Hellesund i sin tur skriver om hur singelkvinnor under perioden fungerade som störande av genusstrukturen eftersom de deltog i offentligheten, hade en feministisk agenda och utmanade uttryck för feminitet och maskulinitet. I en svensk kontext undersöker Margareta Berger redan 1974 hur själ-
försörjande kvinnor framställdes i veckotidningarna Idun res-
pektive Husmodern. Berger framhåller att Idun tydligt ställer sig på de självförsörjandes sida genom att lyfta upp de svåra arbetsförhållandena med dåliga löner.

VÄGEN TILL LYCKA

I »Vår diskussionsspalt« i Svensk Damtidning 1923 ber en 35-
årig självförsörjande kvinna om råd. Hon måste bestämma sig
för om hon vill gifta sig med en man som hon blivit bekant med.
Hon säger sig inte hysa några kärleksfulla känslor men hon
»högaktar och tycker bra om honom«. Dock oroar hon sig för
vad det äktenskapliga livet kan innebära eftersom hon menar att
de berättelser hon hört verkar som avskräckande exempel:

De flesta av mina väninnor äro gifta, men jag tycker
sannerligen inte, att de ha skäl att rosa marknaden.
Männen äro griniga och snåla och ungarna skräliga. Och
att gå och tigga en man om vartenda öre, det har jag då
inte lust till, van som jag är att ha min egen kassa att
fritt disponera över.

Ibland upplever hon sig emellertid lite ensam och bekymrar sig
också över att denna känsla ska bli mer påtaglig när hon blir
äldre. Ensamheten kanske skulle kunna avhjälpas av en ständig
följeslagare, skriver hon. Brevet avslutar hon med att be om
hjälp från Svensk Damtidnings erfarna och kloka läsarinnor.
Kan en ständig följeslagare väga upp förlusten av frihet och
egna inkomster? Insändaren är signerad av Vankelmodig
ungmö och i fyra nummer av tidningen publiceras nio svar.

Signaturen Ebon menar att det är avgörande att veta vilken
typ kvinna är för att kunna råda henne. Blida och milda
kvinnor som har lätt att anpassa sig säs passa för äktenskap
medan självmordna och självsäkra kvinnor som gärna vill ha
sista ordet bör tänka sig för innan de gifter sig. Signaturen En
erfaren avråde Vankelmodig ungmö från att gifta sig så länge
hon inte är »en kvinna i ordets rätta bemärkelse«. Vidare menar
En erfaren att det i äktenskapet krävs undergivenhet och att en
kvinnan som är van vid att följa sin egen vilja kan få det svårt.
Både En erfaren och Ebon hävdar alltså att det krävs en
specifik kvinnotyp för att ingå äktenskap. Äktenskapets patri-
arkala struktur blottläggs här när en gift kvinna inte förväntas
kunna vara själväktare, självmedveten och »vilja ha sista ordet«. Det intressanta är att det 1920 stiftats nya äktenskapslagar som gjorde att makarna var rättsligt likställda, räde över sin egendom och bar ett gemensamt ansvar för barn och barnuppfostran. Detta avspeglas dock inte i debatten, där kvinnans position i äktenskapet framställs som underordnad i praktiken.


— Hur, vill jag fråga, skall en flicka kunna drömma sunt i denna för hela hennes liv och framtid, så väl som för hennes efterkommande, så viktiga sak, då hon ända sedan barnsben blivit impregnerad med giftastankar av mamma, tanter, släkt och vänner, av svärmande skolkamrater, av den skönlitteratur hon läser, god som dålig, biografer, teater – allt, allt till den grad erotiskt betonat, att det sannerligen är ett under att de unga flickorna icke bli tio gånger värre snedvridna, än de värkligen äro.

V-i talar om en impregnering av giftastankar, det som vi idag skulle benämnas som den heterosexuella tvåsamtalssnormen, och hur unga kvinnor ska kunna göra ett aktivt och eget val, om samhället om och om igen talar om för dem att de bör gifta sig. Liksom i insändaren ovan som uppmanar till att förbli människa, menar V-i att kvinnofrigörelsen öppnat upp för kvinnans rätt att vara människa och försörja sig själv. Att skriva in till veckopressen för att be om råd kring om en bör gifta sig eller inte tyder på en osäkerhet inför besluten som kan kopplas till det som V-i lyfter fram, nämligen att styras av normerna och kunna skilja dem från den egna viljan.

Vankelmodig ungmö fråga om huruvida hon bör gifta sig eller inte visar på att det fanns ett aktivt val att göra. Det framgår av diskussionen som följer i tidningen att det heterosexuella äktenskapet inte alltid ansågs vara det bästa för kvinnor. Tydligt blir också att valet står mellan ett självstän- digt liv som självförsörjande och en underordnad position som
hustru. Äktenskapet sägs inte vara en garant för att slippa ensamhet, utan ensamheten i äktenskapet anses kunna bli så mycket större. *Vankelmodig ungmö* uppmanas istället att hitta vägar utanför äktenskapet för att få ett tillfredsställande liv, till exempel genom vänskap eller fosterbarn.41 Elder menar att det växte fram en diskurs under 1930-talet i vilken australiensiska kvinnor som levde som singlar sågs som fullständiga i sig själva, utanför äktenskap. Hon menar att denna utveckling av synen på självständiga kvinnor var en produkt bland annat av kvinnors förbättrade tillgång till högre utbildning och arbetsmarknaden. Singelskap kom att sammankopplas med värden som fysisk och geografisk frihet, samt friheten att utvecklas som människa.42 Samma syn på självständiga ogifta kvinnor återfinns i den svenska veckopressen under 1920-talet när den äktenskapliga relationen inte alltid framhålls som målet för ett fulländat och lycklig liv.

I ytterligare en insändare avråds *Vankelmodig ungmö* från gifttermål i fall hon inte kan behålla sin egen inkomst.43 Annu en kvinna menar att *Vankelmodig ungmö* istället för att gifta sig bör lägga undan lite pengar varje år så att hon kan klara av ålderdomen på egen hand.44 Denna insändare visar hur äktenskapet förknippades med ofrihet och ekonomiskt beroende.

Holmes som skriver om ogifta kvinnor i Australien mellan 1890 och 1920, menar att vissa medelklasskvinnor gjorde ett aktivt val att inte gifta sig och att det under denna period växte fram en feministisk kritik mot patriarkala strukturer inom äktenskapet. Hon framhåller att många kvinnor hade en längtan efter att vara fria från de fysiska, ekonomiska och emotionella band som äktenskapet skapade och att de ville styra sina egna liv.45 Även i tidskriften *Charme*, som riktar sig till moderna kvinnor och säger sig vara »den moderna tidens spegel«, diskuterar den ofrihet som äktenskapet kan innebära:

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**I VÄNTAN PÅ KÄRLEK**


*En lycklig ungmor* är den enda som anser att vankelmodig ungmö bör gifta sig. Hon framhåller att ungar inte alls endast är skrikiga och menar att hon själv aldrig ångrat att hon gav upp sin frihet och den egna kassan då »vår lycka är stor«. Hon


DE SJÄLVFÖRSÖRJANDE MARKERAR SIN POSITION

Singellivet kontrasteras alltså mot den gifta kvinnans liv. Äktenskapet inramas av tankar kring att som kvinna sitta fastlåst utan nöjen. Nöjen, variation och frihet är ledorden i positiva beskrivningar av självförsörjande kvinnors liv i populärkulturen under 1920-talet. Under rubriken »Självförsörjande kvinnor« i

Även om Jones inte uttalat jämför de självförsörjandes liv med gifta kvinnors går det att ansa att det är det äktenskapliga livet som de självförsörjandes vardag kontrasteras mot. Den självförsörjande sägs vara »fri och obunden« och kan göra »precis vad henne lyster«. Detta får antas vara i kontrast mot de gifta kvinnornas mer inrutade och pliktfyllda liv. De husliga åtagandena med matlagning och barnuppfostran kan istället bytas ut mot »ett par chokladbitar och en cigarett«. Det är ingen ensam och tråkig tillvaro som målas upp i Jones krönika, utan ett aktivt socialt liv med vänner och deltagande i offentligheten med teater- och biografbesök. Liksom den anonyma skinbenten till texten »Kvinnor som berövats rätten att älska« menar Jones att tillvarons lycka inte avgörs genom ett äktenskap, istället finns det anledning att tro att de självförsörjande kvinnornas liv kan bjuda på mer nöjen än de gifta kvinnornas.  

I artikeln »Kärleken och vår moderna tid« i Charme, 1931, beskrivs också hur medelklasskvinnornas liv har förändrats: »Istället för att arbeta på att fylla sina kistor med silver och linne i väntan på att deras riddare skall komma ridande, studera de konst, affärsteknik och vetenskap för att bereda sig själva på kampen för tillvarons lycka«.  

I 1920-talets populärkultur förekommer också skildringar av självförsörjande kvinnor som använder arbetsplatsen, ofta kontoret, och dess kontakter med förhoppning om att möta en framtida make. I en artikel med rubriken »Vad skall en flicka bli« från Charme 1923 kritiseras denna slags flicka »som bara träna och suckar efter äktenskap, därför att hon omöjligen kan inriktas sitt intresse på det mindervärdiga arbetet, hon är dömd

--- ANGREPP PÅ SJÄLVFÖRSÖRJANDE KVINNOR ---


Tankarna kring ett tredje kön diskuterades redan under 1860-talet och kom att användas synonymt med homoseksualitet och hermafroditism. Hulda är väl medveten om att anklagelsen att tillhöra ett tredje kön är en förölämpning och upplevelsen blir en vändpunkt i hennes liv. Hon bestämmer sig för att göra upporna mot Ottilias »maktanspråk«. Hon köper en ny ljusblå vårdräkt och en hatt med vita rosor. Plötsligt bemöter de manliga arbetskamraterna henne helt annorlunda. Hon

ordningen på grund av sin ovilja att gifta sig liksom sitt inträde inom manliga sfärer som sport och yrkesliv. Det budskap som förmedlas till läsaren här är att den som performativt inte skapar kvinnlighet på rätt sätt straffas med ensamhet, medan ett inordnande i normen belönas med lycka och gemenskap. Hellesunds visar att en sådan syn på ogifta kvinnor som oön skade och manliga inte var något nytt, utan även var gällande under perioden 1880–1920.66

Namnet Ottilia är förmodligen lånat av karaktären med samma namn i August Strindbergs novell »Ett dockhem» från 1884 som i sin tur är ett svar på Henrik Ibsens pjäs med samma titel från 1879.67 Det finns således intertextuella kopplingar till en debatt som pågick 40 år tidigare. Ottilia i Strindbergs novell är en ogift kvinna som får protagonistens hustru att ifrågasätta sitt äktenskap och ställa krav på likställighet. Den strindbergska Ottilia anses inte vara ätråvärd av den manliga protagonisten, eftersom hon är lång och har en kortklippt och misslyckad frisyr.68 Precis som den senare Ottilia i Svensk Damtidning förblir hon ensam i slutet av novellen. Att skaffa en äkta man kan ses som målet för en kvinna, både 1884 och 1920. Strindbergs Ottilia förleder den ogift kvinnan att ifrågasätta sin position och skapa osäkerhet i äktenskapet. Genom att låna namnet av denna karaktär skrivs Huldas vännen in i en tradition av förlöjligande av icke-önskvärda kvinnliga karaktärer med ett lesbiskt begär.69 Ottilia kan läsas som ett avskräckande exempel men den självförsörjande kvinnan sätter dock strukturen i gungning genom oviljan att inordna sig och med sina krav på ett självständigt liv och ekonomisk frihet.70

Föreställningar kring att självförsörjande kvinnor låtsas vara nöjda och lyckliga återfinns också i rådgivningsboken Brev till mina dottror författad av Anna Nordenström-Law, som också var en återkommande skribent i Svensk Damtidning under 1920-talet. I denna bok skriver hon:

—— Mina kära barn! Jag vill icke föreställa mig någondan av eder som gammal fröken. Nutidens ogifta, självförsörjande kvinnor hjuda visserligen till att visa sig nöjda och »frigjorda«, i vilket en och annan verklig någorlunda lyckas. Men över de flesta vilar något ängsligt och nervöst, nedtryckt och hårt. Säkert skulle till och med den mest oberoende av dem gärna undvara mycket av sitt oberoende och sin komfort, kunde hon istället lägga sin hand i en god mades och veta, att han vore hennes i hälsa och sjukdom, i med- och motgång, i kraftens dagar och i ålderdomens. Allt fler män vägra gifta sig—Allt fler kvinnor leka, att de föredraga friheten.71

Liksom skribenterna i veckopressens debatter om den självförsörjande kvinnan lyfter Nordenström-Law fram frihet som
Emma Severinsson, »Frihet eller kärlek?«
en motpol till äktenskap, trots att hennes agenda är att ned-
värdera ogifta kvinnors position. Enligt Nordenström-Laws
resonemang kan kvinnor egentligen inte föredra frihet framför
äktenskap, utan »leka« att detta är deras egen önskan. I de
negativa skildringarna av ogifta kvinnor skrivs de fram som
olyckliga. Ån en gång blir begreppet lycka centrat, och kopplas
här samman med en heterosexuell kärleksrelation inom
äktenskapet.

REFLEKTION OCH KONKLUSION

Inom den historiska forskningen om kvinnors tillträde till
arbetsmarknaden och utökade juridiska rättigheter från mitten
av 1800-talet och framåt har länge ett materialistiskt perspekt-
viv dominerat. Tongivande här har Gunnar Qvist varit som tidigt
hävdade att förbättringen av kvinnornas rättigheter kan tolkas
som resultatet av att samhällets kvinnoöverskott tvingade fram
en lösning av frågan om de ogifta medelklasskvinnornas
försörjning. Detta starka fokus på kvinnors självförsörjande
som en ekonomisk nödvändighet har dock gjort att frågan om
vilka drömmar och önskemål kvinnor själva hyste aldrig
undersöks på ett genomgripande sätt.

Särskilt intressant är detta ämne att studera för 1920-talet,
det vill säga den tid då kvinnorna uppnått rösträtt, myndig
het i äktenskapet och tillträde till en större del av arbetsmark-
naden. Frågan om valet mellan att leva som självförsörjande
och självständig kvinna eller att gifta sig var under detta
decennium föremål för återkommande diskussioner i såväl
fiktivt som icke-fiktivt material i svensk veckopress. Genom att
lyfta fram och undersöka denna typ av texter har jag velat
öppna för nya perspektiv på frågan om medelklasskvinnornas
livsval. Det finns inga distinkta skillnader vad gäller synen på
frihet eller äktenskap mellan de veckotidningar som under-
söks. Det är istället så att flera diskurser korsar varandra och
ger möjlighet för fler debatter och frågor att väckas och en
större och heterogen publik som kan identifiera sig inom en
och samma veckotidning. Detta ligger också i linje med Beet-
hams resonemang kring att veckopress ger uttryck för radikal
heterogenitet vad gäller såväl form som innehåll och lämnar
utrymme för mångfald och förhandling.72

I förhandlandet kring kvinnliga genuspositioner i svensk
veckopress under 1920-talet går det att urskilja tre linjer vad
det gäller frågor kring äktenskapet. För det första finns de som
menar att äktenskapet bör undvikas och att en fri och själva-
ständig tillvaro alltid bör gå före äktenskap som kantas av
snåla makar och krävande barn. Frihet blir här ledordet för de
självförsörjande kvinnornas position. För det andra finns de
som argumenterar för att äktenskap bör baseras på kärlek och
att det annars är bättre att leva själv och etablera andra typer
av relationer för att inte vara ensam. Och för det tredje existe-
rar ståndpunkten att äktenskapet är målet, och att kvinnor som väljer en annan väg är manhaftiga och ger uttryck för en misslyckad feminitet. Den sistnämnda ståndpunkten återfinns främst i det fiktiva materialet. Flera veckopressforskare betonar att fiktionen var betydande för veckopressens framgångar under mellankrigstiden och att det var denna som lockade läsare. Det skulle kunna gå att argumentera för att veckotidningarnas fiktionell innehåll var betydande för veckopressens framgångar under mellankrigstiden och att det var denna som lockade läsare. Det skulle kunna gå att argumentera för att veckotidningarnas fiktionell innehåll var betydande för veckopressens framgångar under mellankrigstiden och att det var denna som lockade läsare. Dock är denna undersökning inte tillräckligt omfattande för att dra sådana slutsatser, men det kan vara intressant att fundera över om en sådan koppling skulle kunna förklara skillnaderna.


I denna artikel synliggörs förhandlingar kring ogifta, självförsörjande kvinnors position där det framgår att denna grupp satte värde i ett självständigt liv. Den heteronormativa diskursen utmanas och genuspositionerna förhandlas genom kvinnors ovilja att inordna sig i äktenskapets patriarkala struktur. Undersökningen visar också att det inte endast fanns debatter kring äktenskapets förändring i riktning mot en mer jämlik relation, utan också ett förhandling kring ett liv i singel- skap kunde vara att föredra framför äktenskapet, även för dem som hade möjlighet att välja

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**ENDNOTES**

1 »Vår diskussionsspalt« i Svensk damtidning 11 (Stockholm, 1923), 126.

2 Kvinnor som skriver in till veckopress och ber om råd om de bör gifta sig eller ej finns det flera exempel på under denna period, så som i: Husmodern (Stockholm, 1929), nr 52, 51 och Damernas diskussionsklubb i Idun, nr 10, (Stockholm, 1926), 245-246 och Idun, (Stockholm, 1926), nr 9, 226.


6 Ulrika Holgersson: *Populärkulturen och samhället. Arbete, klas och genus i svensk dampress i början av 1900-talet* (Lund, 2005), 156.
7 Lisbeth Larsson: »Trender i svensk veckopress« i Karl Erik Gustafsson (ed.): *Veckopressbranschens struktur och ekonomi* (Göteborg, 1991), 20.
10 Lisbeth Larsson: *En annan historia. Om kvinnors läsning och svensk veckopress* (Lund, 1989), 127.
13 Holgersson: *Populärkulturen och samhället. Arbete, klas och genus i svensk dampress i början av 1900-talet*, 118.
19 Ovist: *Konsten att blifva en god flicka*, 102.


23 Maja Larsson: Den moraliska kroppen. Tolkningar av kön och individualitet i 1800-talets populärmedicin (Uppsala, 2002), 162.

24 Ulvros: »Den nya kvinnan«, 92.

25 Lindén: Om kärlek. Litteratur, sexualitet och politik hos Ellen Key, 61.


29 Catriona Elder: »The question of the unmarried: Some meanings of being single in Australia in the 1920s and 1930s« i Australian Feminists Studies: 8 (1993), 156.


33 »Vår diskussionsspalt« i Svensk Damtidning: 11 (Stockholm, 1923), 126.

34 »Vår diskussionsspalt« i Svensk Damtidning: 11 (Stockholm, 1923), 126.


39 »Damernas diskussionsklubb» i *Idun*: 27 (Stockholm, 1926), 128.
40 »Damernas diskussionsklubb» i *Idun*:27 (Stockholm, 1926), 128.
42 Elder: »The question of the unmarried«, 154.
43 »Vår diskussionsspalt» i *Svensk Damtidning*: 14 (Stockholm, 1923), 157.
44 »Vår diskussionsspalt» i *Svensk Damtidning*: 14 (Stockholm, 1923), 157.
45 Holmes: »Spinsters Indispensable«, 75.
46 »Kvinnor som berövats rätten att älskas» i *Charme*: 4 (Stockholm, 1933), 20–21.
48 »Vår diskussionsspalt» i *Svensk Damtidning*: 15 (Stockholm, 1923), 170.
49 »Vår diskussionsspalt» i *Svensk Damtidning*: 15 (Stockholm, 1923), 170.
50 »Damernas diskussionsklubb» i *Idun*: 10 (Stockholm, 1926), 245-246.
51 »Damernas diskussionsklubb» i *Idun*: 13 (Stockholm, 1929), 50.
53 »Självförsörjande kvinnor» i *Charme*: 3 (Stockholm, 1923), 6.
54 »Självförsörjande kvinnor» i *Charme*: 3 (Stockholm, 1923), 6.
55 »Kärleken och vår moderna tid» i *Charme*: 4 (Stockholm, 1931), 29.
56 »Vad ska en flicka bli» i *Charme*: 8 (Stockholm, 1923), 10, 24.
58 Fjelkestam: *Ungkarlsflickor, kamrathustrur och manhaftiga lesbianer*, 92-130.
Emma Severinsson: »Frihet eller kärlek?«

60 Waldemarson: »Kön, klass och statens finanser«, 138–140.
64 Eva Blomberg: »Konsten och garderoben« i Madeleine Hurd, Tom Olsson och Lisa Öberg (eds.): Iklädd identitet. Historiska studier av kropp och kläder (Stockholm, 2005), 218.
65 Carls: Våp eller nucka?, 368.
66 Hellesund: »Queering the spinsters«.
68 Strindberg: »Ett dockhem«, 130.
70 Samma år publiceras också novellen »Bara en kvinna« i Svensk Damtidning: 51 (Stockholm, 1920), 517, i vilken protagonisten Erna Friman lämnar man och barn för att förverkliga sina drömmar om att förändra världen genom fredsarbete. Erna är dock ensam och olycklig och inser snart att det är hos familjen hon bör vara. Även här framställs familjeliv och äktenskap som grunden för kvinnors lycka och drömmar om självförverkligande avfärdas.

72 Beetham: *A magazine of her own? Domesticity and desire in the woman’s magazine 1800-1914*, 12.

Anna Nygren, »A special place in the heart: Human-animal affection in Lena Furberg’s Stallgänget på Tuva«

ABSTRACT
This article examines emotions in girls’ relationships with horses as portrayed in Lena Furberg’s cartoon Stallgänget på Tuva (The Stable-Gang at Tuva). Published in the comic Min Häst (My Horse) between 1996 and 2008, the cartoon is an example of the literary genre of the horse book and a broader culture of (fictive and non-fictive) girl-horse-relations. Showcasing a series of sequences from the cartoon, the article suggests various ways to understand the human-animal bonds in relation to other kinds of relationships, to notions of what relationships are and can be and to extant social structures, such as sexism, racism, and capitalism. In the analyses theories from the fields of feminist theory, critical animal studies and practical knowledge are employed. Haraway’s notion of companion species is of particular importance. The article also discusses how the reader’s emotions could be interpreted and touches briefly on the subject of fiction and reality, and how the borders between these are reformulated in relation to the horse book reader.

Anna Nygren holds a master’s degree in comparative literature from Stockholm University, Sweden. She wrote her master thesis on Lena Furberg’s cartoon Stallgänget på Tuva. She has also completed a one-year master’s degree in creative writing from Linneaus University and writes manuscripts for film and theater.

Keywords: emotions, gender, horse books, human-animal relations, Lena Furberg, love

http://lir.gu.se/LIRJ
As a child, I loved horses. I loved them and I was frightened of them. As a result, I read horse books. During certain periods of my childhood I read one or two horse books a day, together with children’s magazines about horses. I felt I could not stop. What appealed to me were the very strong emotions described: the extreme anger, the undeniable love, the jealousy, the sorrow. The texts put into words emotions I hardly dared feel on my own. The girls in the books (they were almost always girls) had no one to trust but their horse. I felt the same; I had no one to trust but my horse, which in my case was a fictive horse. So they, we, built alliances, not with other human beings but with horses and with horse books.

Lena Furberg’s (1957–) cartoons in the comic *Min Häst* (*My Horse*) were, and remain, an important part of this alliance and culture of girl-horse relations. In an interview in a special issue of the journal *Bild & Bubbla* dedicated to her work, Furberg relates how adult readers spontaneously tell her about the importance of her cartoons in their lives – as children and as adults.¹² *Stallgänget på Tuva* (*The Stable-Gang at Tuva*) is one example of Furberg’s popular cartoons. Published in *Min Häst* between 1996 and 2008, it tells different stories of a group of girls that spend all their free time in a stable. The cartoon opens up for ideological as well as existential questions. Several episodes have a radical political potential, showing how girls in their relations with horses protest against patriarchal and capitalist structures. Simultaneously, the relations are governed by the girls’ own premises. In this article I wish to highlight the complexity of the girl-horse-relation, the political potential it may have and the power structures it may both reproduce and reveal.

The horse book genre has long endured quite a low status in literary and academic contexts. It has, in the words of Kristin Hallberg, been seen as »mass literature for girls mad about horses«.³ A similar tendency has been registered in the attitudes towards horse riding compared to other sports in different Swedish contexts. Horse riding receives less attention and respect in media, and the general view of girls interested in horses is often patronizing.⁴ More recent studies have strengthened the value and reputation of the horse book genre,
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and the same goes for the sociological interest in horse-girl cultures. The majority of the works have focused on gender aspects of the genre and community. Susanna Hedenborg’s works on gender roles in human-horse-cultures in a historical perspective – especially her analysis of stable culture and work on horse books from the twentieth century – are relevant for the project in this article; this while Hedenborg focuses more on the community aspects of the stables and the relations between humans and this particular stable culture compared to other parts of society, than on the relation between girl and horse. Hilde Haugen’s doctoral project »Hestens effekt på ungdoms mestringstro, selvfølelse og sosiale kompetanse« in turn examines how young people’s interaction with horses can have a strengthening and therapeutic effect. Furthermore, the anthology Över alla hinder (ed. Hedén, Matthis & Milles) in a series of essays describes different aspects of horse-human relationships, combining a historical perspective with a discussion of girl- and womanhood in stable culture.

In this article, I will continue on the path of gender focus, but also combine it with theories from the fields of Critical Animal Studies and Practical Knowledge, and focus the gender discussions on posthumanist feminist theories, using mainly Donna Haraway’s works concerning »companion species« in The Companion Species Manifesto (2003) and When Species Meet (2007). I will also employ aspects from the anthology Kentaur-ren. Om interaktion mellan häst och människa (edited by Bornemark & Ekström von Essen), which has a Practical Knowledge perspective, for an understanding of the physical relation between girl and horse.

My aim in this article is to examine different aspects of emotions between girls and horses as portrayed in selected sequences in Stallgänget på Tuva, and to suggest various ways to understand them in relation to other kinds of relationships, to ideas of what relationships are and can be, and to social structures. I will examine how the love for horses is portrayed in Furberg’s work and analyse it in terms of love for the individual horse and for horses as a species. I will also touch upon bigger questions such as what kinds of relationships are possible between girls and horses. Moreover, I am interested in examining how horses of different breeds are treated and if there are parallels to how humans are treated, especially in relation to racism. Finally, I will also discuss the question of reading horse books and how the reader’s emotions could be interpreted. I will touch briefly on the subject of fiction and reality, and how the borders between these are partly reformulated in relation to the horse book reader.

The concept of affect is separated from emotions and feelings. Affect is used to describe pre-personal bodily states and intensities; emotion in turn communicated cultural qualities,
The phenomena that this article focuses on are emotions and feelings. The phenomena that this article focuses on are emotions and feelings. The phenomena that this article focuses on are emotions and feelings.

Three more general approaches to the theme are important to understand my take on the genre, the stories, and the relationships. Firstly, to understand the genre of horse books and magazines and its relation to its readers and in part the relationship between girls and horses within the narratives, I make use of the term »dream girls« coined by literary theorist Helen Asklund. The term refers to girl readers who for practical, economic or other reasons do not have any physically real relation to actual horses. They read about horses, dream about horses, yearn to know everything about horses, but they are seldom or never present in a stable. Asklund contrasts these girls to »riding girls« (going to riding schools once or several times a week, but not owning their own horses) and »stable girls« (spending all their time in the stables, with the horses, either owning their own horse or passionately taking care of other peoples horses). In this context it is the dream girl-position that interests me, since it concerns a kind of vicarious love that is extremely strong, though virtual, and impersonal in the sense of involving not only one horse, but all horses (though the dream girl can certainly have an affection for a particular fictive or physical – but ever absent – horse).

Donna Haraway, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of the practical and physical experience of living with non-human animals when writing and theorizing about them. Physical closeness to the non-human individuals fosters an antidote to the mass of abstractions and symbols connected to horses and other non-human animals within art and the humanities – from romanticism to surrealism, from psychoanalysis to (portions of) post-humanism. Working in the field of Practical Knowledge, Jonna Bornemark, Ulla Ekström von Essen, and Petra Andersson take a similar stance. They also highlight what they consider a risk with the posthumanist perspective, namely that when the dichotomy of human-animal is turned into a continuum, the underlying power structures in the relations are made less visible – as one must properly recall that it is still the human writing and theorizing about the relationship. I read the horse book genre in general and Stallgänget på Tuva and Min Häst in particular as potential spaces where these two positions, the dream-abstract-virtual-literary and the physical-practical, intersect and where the borders between the fictive, the biographical, the virtual and the physical are blurred – mostly through how emotions work in the cartoons.

I also wish to emphasize, with Andersson, Bornemark, Ekström von Essen, and Haraway, the importance of viewing the relationship between girl and horse, or human and non-
human as mutual but not equal. This entails highlighting the agency of the non-human actants and paying attention to the unequal power structures structuring the relationships. These power structures are also part of the way horse books and horse culture among girls has been theorized from a feminist point of view. The girls’ ability to handle the larger animal; to control the riding and care-taking situation; to be (mentally and physically) strong and active; and to take on the role of leader has been a signal traits of writings about horse books that emphasize the empowering perspectives in the genre. In this article, I hope to show the ambiguous and ambivalent position the girl in question typically takes in relation to the horse – in terms of power and agency as well as regarding (re) presentation, physicality/non-physicality and emotional connections. I agree on the importance of pointing out the power differences between the horse and the human, but at the same time I am of the opinion that a posthumanist deconstruction of the humanist exclusive position, and a turn from dualism to a concept of interspecies continuum, is an affirmative way of questioning the same power differences.

--- DIFFERENT KINDS OF LOVE ---

Emotions that are given ample room in Stallgänget på Tuva are love, sorrow, and fear – often blended together, blurred and in complicated, seemingly illogical combinations. When the horse Jasmin dies, the girl Petra, who owns Jasmin, first becomes extremely sad. She does not want to remain in the stables and so be reminded of Jasmin. Jasmin has her own and very special place in Petra’s heart – but she has also made Petra love all horses. After some time Petra changes her mind concerning being in the stables:

»But then I thought of the wonderful years Jasmin gave me … How she made me love not only her, but all horses!«
»And of course I couldn’t throw away Jasmin’s gift to me!«

I read this as two different kinds of love, the particular and the universal, which are separated and yet also a part of each other. The human emotion of love towards horses is at the same time exclusive, between one horse and one human, and very broad, between one human and all horses. Thus the personal love furnishes a path toward an extended love and solidarity with another species. In this way the love for an individual being makes a broader political alliance possible. Haraway describes something similar in relation to her love of dogs: »I got curious, and I fell in love. [...] I fell in love with kinds as well as with individuals.« She further explains the concept companion species, which she uses to examine the nonhuman-human
relationship: »Companion species also points to the sorts of being made possible at interfaces among different human communities of practice for whom ‘love of the breed’ or ‘love of dogs’ is a practical and ethical imperative in an always specific, historical context.« This way of understanding can be applied also to the community described in Stallgänget på Tuva. The love of an individual renders it almost impossible not to love also the kin, the kind, the breed and the species, and this love informs and enriches the whole of life in the most tangible ways. Writing from a posthumanist feminist perspective, Rosi Braidotti argues in The Posthuman (2013) that »the point about posthuman relations […] is to see the inter-relation human/animal as constitutive of the identity of each. It is a transformative or symbiotic relation that hybridizes and alters the ‘nature’ of each one and foregrounds the middle grounds of their interaction.« This corresponds to the way Jasmin changes Petra, and how Petra’s love for Jasmin at once transforms her and re-constructs her. Similarly, Haraway refers to the bioanthropologist Barbara Smuts, who through concrete meetings with baboons, and a kind of »becoming-with« the baboons, allowed her research project to extend to the non-human, and herself to engage with the other.

Petra lets herself be changed by Jasmin. This could be regarded as the result of a human-animal alliance, a close and loving relationship of the sort that Helena Pedersen, with reference to Carmen Dell’Aversano, calls »radically subversive«, because it decentralizes the human from the position of a subject taken for granted.

The different theoretical perspectives that I have brought up so far have several similarities – but also harbour important differences. Braidotti is clearly negative to the concept of anthropomorphizing as a way of »extending humanity into the non-human«. Andersson on the other hand, sees (a certain degree of) anthropomorphizing as necessary when it comes to understanding horses. She argues that the relationship between horse and human (referring to physical relations, not literary ones) on behalf of the human is situated between anthropomorphizing and estrangement. In her view it is not possible to fully understand the animal-other, but rather than letting the fear of anthropomorphizing prevent her from seeing similarities and make the horse into a stranger, she assumes that the horse she spends time with is not completely incomprehensible to her.

The relationships in Stallgänget på Tuva linger on the border between anthropomorphizing and estrangement. Sometimes the horse is portrayed as an incomprehensible stranger to the girl (and this sometimes means that the relationship has to end) and sometimes the horse is more comprehensible than other humans, or even more comprehensible than the girl is to herself.

In Furberg’s cartoon, love is also intertwined with the emotion of fear. When the girl Lina is injured in an accident she
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gets scared. First and foremost it is horse jumping that scares her: »But... jumping? Lina’s stomach tied itself up in tight knots.« It is a physically manifested feeling of fear. But at the same time it is impossible for Lina to stop loving horses. Her love becomes impractical, and thus forms a contrast to the kind of interest in horses that only focuses on riding (what Asklund calls characteristic of the riding girls). Lina’s love is a contradictory and complicated love since the horse-girl-relationship is constituted by, or expected to be formed through, riding. It is a love filled with fear, with physicality, fantasy and longing.

This kind of love is also connected to »problematic horses«, horses that are not easy to ride, who are diseased, troublesome or violent. A more critical view of the relationship between the girl and the »problematic horses«, could compare this narrative to that of a woman and a »problematic« man, as a sort of female sacrifice and self-destructive caretaking. Andersson’s research on academic and non-academic horse girl cultures shows that there is a strong urge among researchers and writers to explain why girls like horses and horse riding. The answers to the question is often psychologising and sexualizing. Andersson mentions a number of common responses to such questions, among which are; the interest in horses is a kind of preparation for the girl’s heterosexual relation to a man, and; girls do horse riding because it makes it possible for them to practice their female and motherly virtues. That the comparison between the love of horses and the heterosexual feminine care-taking can been criticized and problematized, does not need to exclude that there are similarities in the tendency to take care of and hold on to an impossible love (regardless of whether this tendency is seen as innate, learned, a result of oppression, a way of exercising power, make alliances, express sympathy or solidarity or all of the above or something else altogether). The tendency to hold on could also be regarded as non-feminist, at the same time as a negative critique of the tendency could also be problematic from a feminist point of view. In sum, the girl vis-à-vis-problematic-horse relationship could be an example of an ambiguous kind of bond that the girl and the horse share. A love, perhaps, that is as destructive as constructive.

The unpractical love that the fear exposes and that exists in the girls’ relations to the so-called »problematic horses« can be put in contrast to a more action-related love that also exists in the stables. This latter love is for example shown when the girl Bea describes what she plans to do when her horse Granis can no longer be used for harness racing: »There was no end to how much fun one could have with horses; riding, driving, training, competing, they could be ones best friends. And one never knows what could happen!« It is a love that is also aimed
toward what humans can do with horses. Here the love for the horse as an individual, a species, a body, mingles with the love for horses as collective embodiments of potential activities and actions. These kinds of love could be regarded as incompatible, but they are still united in the girls in *Stallgänget på Tuva*. So the stable is a place for all feelings, all experiences.

The emotions also lead to actions. The girls in the cartoon – and their readers – feel with the horses. It could manifest itself in a longing for a horse of one’s own, but also in anger when facing injustices and cruelty (against horses, but also against other non-human animals) or irritation at how prejudices connected to gender, species, social class or other perceived relevant factors influence how humans treat non-humans. One example of how emotions lead to actions is how the girl Bea’s love for the horse Skrållan saves Skrållan’s life: »But still … if Bea hadn’t had the courage to lend her heart for a while… what would have happened to Skrållan? She had probably been sent to the slaughterhouse.«

Love is described as something hard, something that Bea, and other girls, need the courage to articulate publicly, but that has a great power and a potential to save lives – even though this life-saving opportunity is not equal, but in itself something that influences the power structures in the horse-girl-relationship.

**RACISM AND RIGHTS**

The episode about Bea and Skrållan could be read in the context of racist and capitalist views of horses. Skrållan is a racehorse who has not done very well on the racetrack. Thus her owner considers her »worthless«. This makes it obvious how the horse’s life is determined by a capitalist structure – something the girls in *Stallgänget på Tuva* fight. The capitalist structure is also a racist structure, since the trotter is regarded as a specific breed, and different breeds are treated differently. Another example shows the discrimination even more clearly. The girls Anna and Linn are looking for a trainer to their horse Queen:

»Thanks, but I don’t work with ex-trotters.«
»I specialize in warmbloods performing in dressage.«
»I… I have too much at the moment.«
»‘Too much’?! Then why is he advertising [for horses to train]?!«

Anna and Linn were both angry and disappointed. This was racial discrimination!!
»I’m going mad!! This is so unfair! Just because Queen has been a trotter!!«
»If they would do this to humans you could report it to the police!!«

Anna Nygren, »A special place in the heart«
Anna and Linn make a connection to racial discrimination and so implicitly construe a connection between how humans and animals are unfairly treated. Writing about her relationship with her dog Cayenne, Haraway makes the same connection between racialization among humans and nonhumans: »One of us, product of a vast genetic mixture, is called ‘purebred.’ One of us, equally a product of a vast mixture, is called ‘white.’ Each of these names designates a different racial discourse, and we both inherit their consequences in our flesh.«29 Is this racial discrimination against the horse more of an indirect discrimination of the girl-horse relation, or of the girl, than of the horse? Haraway puts it as follows, connecting a rhetoric of rights with a capitalist structure: »creating demand for treatment is crucial to market success. [...] I feel obligated to investigate and buy all the appropriate supplements that ride the wavering line between foods and drugs [...] Dogs in capitalist technoculture have acquired the right to health,« and the economic (as well as legal) implications are legion.«30 There is a strong intersection between racialized hierarchies and capitalist structures in the description of Queen’s situation.

When Anna and Catherine take the wounded Queen to the veterinary, it becomes clear that the discrimination also has fatal consequences, since the veterinary does not want to treat Queen. »’He didn’t even try – he simply ignored us! And – you know why, don’t you?!’ Because to him Queen is only a worthless ex-trotter!«31 The racial discrimination in the horse community described in Tuva connects racism to issues of class and capitalism. It is the money that counts. And the breed, the pedigree, is connected to the money. The hierarchy among horse breeds are based on human behaviour and human use of horses. This system of categorisation, hierarchization, makes possible an oppression of both non-humans and humans. In Stallgänget på Tuva the oppression causes anger and frustration – emotions that might also affect the reader.

READING EMOTIONS

Most experiences described in the cartoon are subjective feelings, one girl’s feelings for one horse, or several horses. But I would argue that there are also some more collective experiences at work here, both in the fiction and in the readers reading the comics. It is not only psychologically interesting or explainable emotions that are part of the narrative and the world it creates and the emotions are not only to be understood on an individual level. The collectivity formed by the girls within the fiction and with the (girl) readers is based on common emotions – on the way the human girls feel for the non-human. Furberg also uses different kinds of truth claims and meta-fictive elements – like introducing new characters to the story which have already read the comics, and presenting the
narratives as based on true stories – in a complex way to create a world that includes both physical reality and fictive or virtual stories to place the readers within the fiction and furthermore complicate the relationship and the representation of it.

The emotions between girl and horse are simultaneously strictly personal and part of a greater whole; they are individual and physical, as well as aimed at both real and virtual horses. Much more could be said about the way these girls relate to horses (these horses and all horses), which could be compared with how humans in other contexts relate to non-humans on an emotional, personal, collective and cultural level. Here, I will touch on the topic very briefly. It boils down to the question of how humans love non-humans. This question though, is all too focused on the human part of the relationship and so ignores the way the non-human relates to the human – a perspective that is harder to analyze since it necessarily involves a writing practice that in itself is anthropomorphizing (a point that conversely does not mean that I think it is possible to fully describe the human girls’ feelings in words). The perspectives presented by Haraway and Andersson are useful in order to understand the girl-horse-relation in Stallgänget på Tuva. Haraway writes about concrete animal and human interactions, how their bodies are, or can be, attuned to each other, and she refers to the ethologist Jean-Claude Barrey, who has studied riders and horses: »'Human bodies have been transformed by and into a horse’s body. […] Both embody each other’s mind’«.32 In connection to the narratives in Stallgänget på Tuva and other horse books, I would say this state of attunement is both something that occasionally happens and something that the girls desire and long for. The »alliances« between humans and non-humans that Haraway writes about, which are queer and radical in the way they decentralize the human subject, are at the center of the girl-horse-relation and the culture it creates – but not in an non-complicated way, as I have already pointed out. The love for the horse could also be a way of oppressing the same (and other) horses, and the relation, just as every other relation, for example those between humans or groups of humans, can never be equal.

Another important aspect of the girl-horse-relationship in Stallgänget på Tuva involves various forms of failure: failure to feel the connection between girl and horse, failure to understand and to care for the other in the right way. Just like the »dream girls« might be said to fail in their love – they do not get the horse they long for – the dreams of the Tuva-girls are not always fulfilled. As the case of the »problematic loves« shows, the stable at Tuva is replete with failed relationships, and this is something that probably is familiar to most readers of the cartoon. From my own experience of reading Stallgänget på Tuva and other texts in the horse book genre, I would say that
the cartoons could comfort me and empower me at times when my more physical horse-relations were not what I wanted them to be. In a way this situation could be compared to the one analysed in Janice A. Radway’s seminal *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (1984, 1991). In the second edition of the book Radway is critical of her own work, but still comments on the interesting results from an analysis that combines and compares a focus on the reading as event and the text in question. Her work concerns women who saw themselves first as wives and mothers and for which the reading of the romances was a sort of emancipatory, social activity, even though the chosen texts in many ways proved to express typically patriarchal narratives. In the same way as their reading of the heterosexual romance can be read in relation to the women’s own situation within the heterosexual structures of desire, the horse-book reader’s reading of the happy horse-girl relation could be read as a way of through fiction vicariously receiving what one desires but lacks in the real world. What is interesting in Radway’s analysis in the present context is the way she connects a particular text to a particular space and a particular audience. Of course this unveils some of the patriarchal ideas of universal values and what can gain these values (i.e. stories of women and girls and horses are not of universal interest) – but there is something interesting in the almost separatist construction of the particular group. A particularity that is certainly present in the reading of the horse book genre. The problems of reading genre books – as a scholar or as an ordinary reader, as a girl or as her future adult version – are several, connected to analysed and non-analysed affects and reactions, to critical and non-critical positions, to political standpoints, desires and pleasure. Here I will venture only a few comments.

Writing about the chick-lit genre, Maria Nilsson discusses the importance of avoiding a polarized reading that sees the genre as either traditional or subversive, rather recommending a reading that recognizes the ambiguities in the texts. The tendency to defend the genre and its readers is just as unproductive as the critique of pop culture. One way of avoiding this tendency would be to take the emotions connected to the reading and the narratives seriously. An analysis of these emotions, combined with a discourse analysis informed about power hierarchies within the fictions as well as the reader’s situation, and in the case of horse books also within the human community of horse lovers as well as its surroundings, would be one way to do this.

When reading about the emotions and the situations creating them, these emotions also impact the reader. And I would argue that the genre conventions of horse books, as well as of youth literature in general, might be said to both be aware of this
affective impact, and to make use of its known or inferred effects by way of how it addresses the readers. How should the girl reader’s emotions from reading the horse books be interpreted? When trying to answer this question, my thoughts on the subject have shifted a lot. In Touching Feeling (2003) Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick writes about reading and affect in several interesting ways. In the essay »Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is About You« she reflects upon the influence that the so-called »hermeneutics of suspicion« has had on critical thinking and queer theory. She suggests that a paranoid reading should be considered not the only way of reading, but one of many possible readings.

A paranoid reading in the context of the horse book genre might suggest that the affection between girl and horse is a way of reproducing the woman-nature bond that a binary world view suggests and furthermore what is expected of female caretaking: a way of incorporating ideas of ownership by making the reader desire to own another being: a way of civilizing girls in to a hard work moral, or a way of strengthening the role of a monogamy in relationships. And the affects that the writers and publishers might be aware of could in the same way be viewed as way of getting the reader caught up in emotions instead of critically reading the texts. This way of reading the genre should not be ignored. However, Kosofsky Sedgwick’s way of stressing the importance of non-dualism opens up for a position where this reading could be combined with more reparative ones. A reparative reading would highlight the companionship and alliances described in Stallgänget på Tuva. It could also make sense of the way emotions could be used as strengths, as ways of feeling solidarity, motivating action – and in this case opening up readers’ minds to non-human relations, suggesting possible ways of resisting gender roles. The emotions I find conveyed in Stallgänget på Tuva are, among others, anger, sorrow and frustration at not being understood, and a kind of love that might also make the reader jealous. The feelings are often directed against an adult world, and create an alliance between the fictive girls and the readers, based on recognition – real or imagined.

Kosofsky Sedgwick also presents an interesting view on the position of the reading body. She compares the lowering of the eyelids, the lowering of the eyes, the hanging of the head of a reading person with descriptions of attitudes of shame and argues that there is a »force-field creating power of this attitude«. According to Kosofsky Sedgwick this power cannot (only) be understood as the escapism of reading – an escape from »the ‘real world’ […] the ‘responsibility’ of ‘acting’ or ‘performing’ in that world« – but as a way of expressing attention and interest. The connection to shame might seem farfetched in this context – but I contend it is not really so.
Kosofsky Sedgwick describes how «[w]ithout positive affect, there can be no shame: only a scene that offers you enjoyment or engages your interest can make you blush.» And the horse book reader certainly recognizes this: the need to defend horses and her love of horses; horse books and her love for such book, from grownups who find the genre of low quality, from similarly aged boys (and sometimes but more seldom girls) who find the love of horses silly – and how this need to be defensive after a while makes one doubt one's own feelings and taste, hiding the book as well as the bag with riding clothes.

--- CONCLUSIONS: DIFFERENCE AND SOLIDARITY ---

In this article I have attempted to describe a few different entries into the field of emotions in the girl-horse-relationship as represented in Lena Furberg’s cartoon Stallgänget på Tuva. The main focus has been on girls’ feelings for horses, which is also the part of the relation that is described in the cartoon. The relation is mutual, which the cartoon also stresses, but the experiences of the horses are not in focus – a fact that is also part of the bigger question that I have briefly touched on; namely, what can the relationship between a girl, or girls, and a horse, or horses, be? Since this is a complex question, the space of this article has only allowed me to outline a few possibilities toward a further understanding of its parameters.

To conclude, I want to stress the way in which the horse book genre in general, and Stallgänget på Tuva in particular, evokes a time and a place where different emotions are intertwined in a complicated way – and this in a fashion that makes any kind of distinction between reproduction of and resistance against norms impossible. Intense emotions affect the ordinary lives and the way of thinking, feeling and acting of the fictive as well as real girls (and indirectly, the horses) involved. As Hedén, Matthis and Milles express it in Över alla hinder, life as a horse-loving girl involves the most extreme happiness but also the deepest violations and mockery. The world outside the stables does not understand or value the emotions and the knowledge and the life of the horses and girls. This is connected to the way stable culture is feminized (or girlized), which in turn influences the devaluation of horse riding as a sport and of the horse books as a literary genre. This devaluation is certainly a significant part of the horse-girl-lives and the structures affecting it, but I also think that these terms (»sport« and »literary genre«) might be too narrow to express the connection between horse and girl and how the relationships affect the lives of the ones involved and the way they regard life.

The stories in Stallgänget på Tuva concern the situated, the specific, the embedded and embodied feelings and emotions between particular girls and horses. But they also touch upon
the universal: the love of all horses, the alliance with another species. I am not always sure what kinds of stories are told. The stories are not purely good, nor are the contexts or the emotions. But they open up for possibilities. Kosofsky Sedgwick writes: »My premise is that touch ramifies and shapes accountability. Accountability, caring for, being affected, and entering into responsibility are not ethical abstractions; these mundane, prosaic things are the result of having truck with each other.« In relation to the horses drawn and written by Furberg, I wonder, is it possible to touch a fictive horse? To be touched by one, or by many? Several episodes in Stallgänget på Tuva are certainly touching, and I would argue that the different kinds of touching have a lot in common in the context of a girl-horse-culture that makes no clear distinction between fact and fiction. The stories in Tuva are stories about difference and similarities – between the readers and the fictive characters, between the girls and the horses. And I read them as a possible opening for regarding difference as solidarity, to see hard work and troubled feelings as a kind of love.

ENDNOTES

2 The issue also contains a cartoon by Maria Wigelius that expresses the influence from Furberg on her own artistic work as well as on her own love for horses. (Maria Wigelius: »En serieuppväxt« in Bild & Bubbla 191:2 (2012).
3 Kristin Hallberg: »Hästböcker: En litteratur att ta på allvar« in Opsis Kalopsis 2 (2003), 35. All translations from the Swedish by the author.
6 http://www.hestogungdom.no/ (2015-12-13).
8 Helen Åsklund: »Hästflickan i förändring i Linn [sic] Hallbergs och Pia Hagmars hästböcker«, in Eva Söderberg, Mia Österlund and Bodil Formark (eds.): Flicktion: Perspektiv på flickan i fiktionen (Malmö, 2013).
10 Jonna Bornemark & Ulla Ekström von Essen: »Inled-
ning« in Jonna Bornemark and Ulla Ekström von Essen (eds.): Kentauren. Om interaktion mellan häst och människa (Stockholm, 2010), 16.


12 Hallberg: »Hästböcker: En litteratur att ta på allvar«, 38.


14 Donna J. Haraway: When Species Meet (Minneapolis & London, 2007), 96.

15 Haraway: When Species Meet, 134.

16 Rosi Braidotti: The posthuman (Cambridge, 2013), 79.

17 Haraway: When Species Meet, 23.


19 Braidotti: The posthuman, 79.


21 »Men… hoppa då? Det knöt sig, hårt, i Linas mage «.

22 Asklund: »Hästflickan i förändring i Linn [sic] Hallbergs och Pia Hagmars hästböcker«, 245.

23 In this context, it is also relevant to note that the name Killen in Swedish means »boy«.


26 »Och ändå… om Bea inte vågat låna ut sitt hjärta för en tid… hur hade det då gått för Skrållan? Antagligen hade hon gått till slakt.«

27 I use a universal term as »racism« here in line with how the situations are described in Furberg’s cartoon. I do not claim that this is a correct (or in every possible situation correct) understanding of the term, but it certainly has similarities with Haraway’s use of it. In that way I argue that the worldview in Furberg’s work (which partly reflects the context of Min Häst as a whole) can be combined with the one that Haraway and Andersson express. It is a view of the world that recognizes oppressive structures, but sometimes in a universalistic way, e.i. most grown-up horse owners are described as evil, and boys are often described as enemies – and the kind grown-ups (for example parents) and boys are described as exceptions – and there is a strong sense of responsibility among the girls, and (an informal) teaching of good horsemanship – and little questioning of what that means.
29 Haraway: *When Species Meet*, 15.
30 Haraway: *When Species Meet*, 49.
34 Radway: *Reading the Romance*, 7.
40 Kosofsky Sedgwick: *Touching Feeling*, 36.
ABSTRACT
The starting point of this article is the notion of landscapes as intra-active places for dwelling and becoming. Informed by feminist and material ecocritical theory, it aims to make visible a connection between vegetation, water, dirt, affect, and subjects in literary texts. Against a comparative backdrop of the work of the French philosopher and writer Simone de Beauvoir, the article looks at the relationship between humans and nature in contemporary Swedish literature. The analyses explore three fictional young women’s experiences of being-in-nature in three novels: Hanna Nordenhök’s Det vita huset i Simpang (The White House in Simpang) (2013), Sara Stridsberg’s Happy Sally (2004) and Mare Kandre’s Bübins unge (Bübin’s kid) (1987). The purpose is to investigate how literary texts can depict and convey experiences of sensuality, embodiment, and belonging within landscapes as something meaningful in terms of the subject’s continuous process of becoming. It is argued that the novels articulate intimate and tactile bonds between the young women and the organic environment that combine creation and destruction, sometimes resembling notions of love.

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Keywords: embodiment, Hanna Nordenhök, landscape, love, Mare Kandre, material ecocriticism, Sara Stridsberg, vegetation

http://lir.gu.se/LIRJ
SENSUAL GRASS TOUCHING HUMID SKIN:
Finding Love in the Relationship between Subject and Landscape

My hair is heavy with twigs and leaves that silently fall to the ground when I turn around, and it is sweet, quiet; branches trail along the ground; the sweet, heavy leaves come loose, gleaming with sap, hitting the grass with a dry, thin sound, like dead flies.¹

This article is about fictional young women in contemporary literature. It is about their bodies and how they respond to the green surroundings in which they are situated. When examining the relationship between women and landscape, however, one must, first of all, recognize the complexity of the topic. In feminist theorizing, for example, the relationship between gender and nature has for long already been a source of tension, with two seemingly contradictory positions juxtaposed with each other. On the one hand, any association between femininity and nature has typically been couched in terms of power relations and patriarchal exploitation of both women and natural resources. On the other hand, however, perspectives have also been put forth that highlight nature as a place for women to become and find momentary relief from the oppressive conventions of society. In the philosophical and aesthetic writings of the feminist icon Simone de Beauvoir, the tension between the two is made particularly manifest.

In her portrayals of young girls’ processes of becoming, de Beauvoir describes a certain bond between the subjects in question and the landscape they inhabit. Sometimes this bond is characterized by abjection, but sometimes it also takes on the characteristic of something dynamic, almost subversive. This is exemplified especially well in de Beauvoir's The Second Sex (Le deuxième sexe, 1949) and in her more autobiographical work Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter (Mémoires d’une jeune fille rangée, 1958).

The idea of approaching de Beauvoir’s texts from an ecocritical framework might, however, at first glance seem less than self-evident or even justified. Indeed, de Beauvoir’s existentialist philosophy builds on an anthropocentric view of the world, one in which human intention, will, and perception form the focal points, leading many to overlook the ecocritical potential contained in her output. In The Second Sex, de Beauvoir clearly
Johanna Lindbo, »Sensual Grass Touching Humid Skin« states that the benefit a non-urban landscape provides for her young woman characters is in how it makes them human: among flowers, lakes, and birds her adolescent girl can claim her humanity and her body, affirming a setup in which that which is human is defined in contrast to the more-than-human. Also her other writings offer a plethora of intellectual and aesthetic descriptions of nature that address the relationship between that which is human and that which is more-than-human, or, more precisely, between the feminized body and organic landscapes. For de Beauvoir, this relationship is to be understood as something other than an essentialist connection presenting the bond between women and Nature as being primarily about female biology, viewed through a binary system of classifications. This intrigues me, much because such a connection between women and nature can be highly problematic in various ways, but also because I find it beautiful when thinking of it through my own experiences. Reading de Beauvoir awakens memories in me, some of them rather awkward, of my own adolescence. In them, I am in different kinds of landscapes, such as a pine forest or a muddy freshwater lake twenty minutes from my home, leading me to wonder how young women’s connection to nature is portrayed in contemporary Swedish prose.

In this article, I attempt to extend on de Beauvoir’s characterizations of the (at least potential) relationship between humans and the flora and other elements of nature usually referred to as non-subjects, with the ultimate aim of exploring whether such relationships might even be conceived of in terms of what we ordinarily call love. To be able to more concretely analyse how literary texts portray experiences of sensuality, embodiment, and belonging within landscape, I examine novels by three Swedish authors: Hanna Nordenhök (b. 1977), Sara Stridsberg (b. 1972), and Mare Kandre (1962–2005). My examination is guided by the following main questions: Can such experiences be understood as meaningful in terms of the subject’s continuous process of becoming, and if so, in which ways? What can such experiences contribute to our understanding of the relationship between humans and our environment? To what extent, if at all, might it be possible to describe that relationship as also being about ‘love’? To pursue these questions, I draw upon perspectives derived from (somewhat loosely shaped) material ecocriticism, which stress the mutual entwinement of human bodies, nature, materiality, and discourse. Proceeding from them, it becomes possible to address the more-than-human bodies and elements in literary plots as valuable for them both as metaphors and as matter.

In the analysis, the writings of de Beauvoir provide an inspirational backdrop, while the primary sources for this study – three novels by contemporary Swedish authors – all in
their individual ways emphasize the material aspects of being a subject situated in a body of flesh. Such human-flesh-ness is also what previous research has drawn attention to, in discussing abjection and femininity, especially in the case of Stridsberg and Kandre.3 Adopting a material, ecocritical perspective will help research along these lines to move forward, by throwing light on new ways of understanding embodiment and becoming, understandings in which flesh-ness and agency no longer are restricted to the human body alone.

The delirious narrative in Kandre’s Bübins unge (Bübin’s Kid) (1987) tells the story of the young girl Kindchen who, together with another child, Ungen, is left alone in a house surrounded by an overgrown garden. As their hunger and solitude grows deeper, Kindchen travels further into the garden and the adjoining forest. The garden as a literary motif features also in Nordenhök’s novel Det vita huset i Simpang (The White House in Simpang) (2013), a fragmented story of Zus, a child of a wealthy plantation owner in Indonesia in the late 1930s, who spends her days with her younger brother in her family’s lush garden, keeping a journal of her gardening efforts. In Stridsberg’s Happy Sally (2004), on the other hand, the landscapes consist of lakes and oceans, while the narrative, just as in Nordenhök’s story of Zus, remains fragmented, with letters, memories, and postcards forming the plot in which the main character Ellen is drawn closer and closer to water. What unites these three novels is that they all thematize the feminized body, while at the same time offering three different settings in which the elaboration on the theme takes place – and not only in a geographical sense, but also in terms of the historical period and the protagonists’ social class and biological age.

In what follows, a brief theoretical introduction will first be provided to the eclectic field of feminist material ecocriticism. After that, an analysis of the three novels follows, with a focus on their characters’ sense of belonging, encounter, and embodiment. The article concludes with a brief discussion on how the findings from this analysis might speak for any manifestation of love in these relationships.

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BEING CLOSE TO NATURE

In this article, my purpose is to sketch a theoretical framework based on the work of philosophers and theorists who, from different positions, have contributed to notions of human and more-than-human relationships. Some of these authors have focused on love and affect, while others are important because of the ecocritical view they take on landscape and agency. All of them, however, speak in one voice when it comes to understanding love, body, and becoming: emphasizing energy, growth, and decomposition.

In feminist theory, cultural associations between women and
nature has for long already been subjected to interrogation, scrutiny, and criticism. In *The Second Sex*, for instance, de Beauvoir describes how men seek ‘the Other’ and ‘Nature’ in women, but that the form of nature they reach for in women in fact brings them feelings of both discomfort and pleasure:\(^4\) nature, for men, is something to be discovered and conquered, and yet it resists all such attempts, in the end defeating those trying to own it, with its chaotic and mysterious ways.\(^5\) Elsewhere, Merchant has argued that the symbolic connection typically drawn in the West between women and nature underpins the exploitation of both women and the Earth.\(^6\) Closely linked to this image of women as nature is a dualistic understanding of gender and sex, one in which men are associated with culture, intellect, and soul, while women become nature, body, and earthiness. As Mohanty has shown, however, such universal applications of gender dualisms remain deeply problematic, as the constructs behind them are about discourses of representation, not about material realities.\(^7\) The positioning of women as nature and object will, in general, never be stable, since the category dissolves into multiple new groupings shaped by factors such as class, sexuality, nationality, race, age, and functionality. As Dyer, for example, has demonstrated, even if the power of white women remains far from identical to that of white men, they are nevertheless able to both acquire and exercise power vis-à-vis other groups of women, merely by virtue of being white.\(^8\) Indeed, with the help of a combined perspective of critical whiteness studies and feminist ecocriticism, the notion of »women as nature« emerges as a hierarchical construct, one in which animality and earthiness are ascribed differently to different feminized bodies, with the bodies of white, especially Nordic and Anglo-Saxon, women being the ones least associated with Nature, at least in the West. In addition, there is nothing inherent in such nature association to compel us to see it as necessarily carrying a negative or reductive connotation; it may have simply come to be viewed as such as a result of Western capitalist societies’ arrogant attitude towards nature and all other kinds of knowledge different from that of our own. It is precisely for this reason that material ecocriticism, in bringing together narratology, phenomenology, philosophy, ecology, sociology, and biology, can serve as an important tool for understanding the relationships between human and more-than-human as dynamic networks.

As a motif in literary history, the relationship between feminized characters and landscape has featured in the work of feminist writers for some time already. At times, it has remained unthematized in the background, as in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), in which the open landscapes of the English
heaths play a subtle yet important part of the narrative. Other authors have placed the landscape more in the centre of the plot, such as, notably, Jane Lindsay in her *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1967), which explores the mysterious vanishing of young white girls in a dry Australian outback portrayed as simultaneously captivating and consuming. The novels of the Brontë sisters have, indeed, become the subject of much attention, not least by scholars such as Gilbert, Gubar, and Spivak, whose analyses have been influential in field of feminist literary studies; especially Spivak’s critical reading of both *Jane Eyre* and Gilbert and Gubar’s earlier study of the same novel have had a major impact on later post-colonial and critical whiteness studies on literary history in general and the problematic connection drawn between race, subjection, and animality in particular. However, the relationship between young women and nature in the writings and lives of the Brontë sisters was also picked up and addressed by de Beauvoir. In *The Second Sex*, she lingers on the subject, placing it in relation to writings by Colette and Mary Webb to argue that vegetation and animals enable young women to claim their subjection.

In examining feminized human subjects’ relationships with landscape in literary texts in this article, the term ‘landscape’ denotes a specific space in nature. As Davies has defined it, landscapes are »natural insofar as everything is natural… [while] at the same time [they are] discursively constituted.« A landscape is a place of dwelling; it can be a city landscape, treeless tundra, or a field of wheat. Here Davies herself goes as far as naming the mother’s body as the first (internal) landscape mammals encounter. In the analysis of the novels by Kandre, Stridsberg, and Nordenhök in this article, however, the term is used primarily to describe the spaces in nature that the characters inhabit and experience. These landscapes are shaped by both material and discursive elements that incorporate history, location, and biological factors. In *My Garden (Book)* (1999), for instance, the author and gardener Jamaica Kincaid writes about the imperialistic history of plants and garden, using the island of Antigua as an example of how the flora can change dramatically as a result of colonialism and trade. In this regard, her writing often corresponds to that of Vandana Shiva, Terre Ryan, and Veronica Strang, who all make references to concepts such as »botanical piracy« and »gardening the world« to reflect on the various ways in which imperialism has shaped, and continues to shape, our planet’s ecology. While these, to be sure, are all discursive elements in that they are political and historical, they at the same time also have a clear and consequential material dimension: they critically impact flora and fauna. In an ecocritical reading, issues like these are necessary to address, since they affect the interconnectedness between, and experiences of, what we see as human
and what we understand as landscape. Just as with interhuman relationships, moreover, also here questions of power and identity have consequences for the affective relationships between humans and more-than-humans.

Love is often perceived as something specific to the human species, which makes it an interesting subject to approach from an ecocritical perspective. As Ferguson and Jónasdóttir, for instance, have emphasized:

—love is a distinctive, creative/re-creative human capacity and energy that – on its own and/or fused with other essential human capacities, such as the capacity to work – allows humans to act intentionally together to form and change their life and living conditions.¹⁴

Here love is linked to intentionality, progress, and capacity characteristic of the life of human subjects, while no thought is given to other species’ ability to experience love. For de Beauvoir, too, while such love presupposes mutual freedom and the ability to be both subject and object, this quintessential mutuality remains the (potential) property of the relationship between two or multiple human subjects only.¹⁵ As Lowe has noted in discussing de Beauvoir’s notions of love and freedom, such »authentic love«, however, can, for de Beauvoir, only be achieved when women are socially, economically, and politically independent.¹⁶ In Western patriarchy (described by de Beauvoir in The Second Sex), it will thus remain difficult, if not altogether impossible, to achieve, with women relegated to the role of the other allowing men to ignore their equal status as free subjects.

As I will try to show in this article, love can, however, also be understood in a somewhat different way. Assuming that love, as Ferguson and Jónasdóttir have proposed, is energy capable of both creating and re-creating, it can also be taken to manifest itself in the act of experience and embodiment. To enable an examination of how this might apply to relationships between human subjects and landscape, Bennett’s term assemblage is helpful, uniting as it does both human and more-than-human agency.¹⁷ In considering the interrelations between human and more-than-human bodies, Bennett has argued that these relationships need to be recognized as characterized by mutuality, in that the parties to them that are more-than-human also bring agency and power into the relationship, even when they are a thing, an object. To help us move beyond the world of subject-centred and often intentionally driven agents, Bennett employs the term actant to describe the source of action, which can be human, more-than-human, or both.¹⁸ She then proceeds to discuss the meeting between actants as the very catalyst of what is to come: together the actants form an assemblage of
bodies transforming, acting, and creating. Viewing the fields visible outside the window of my own home, actants such as the farmer, weather, minerals, birds, grains, and machines can be seen forming an assemblage, a body constituted of numerous bodies transforming and pushing the development. In what follows, it is precisely assemblages of this kind, of feminized characters and landscapes, that I will investigate with the aid of a feminist, material, and ecocritical perspective, asking whether it might be possible to understand it as transformative and affective energy, one that we might even be able to describe as involving the dimension of love.

LANDSCAPES OF FREEDOM?

The main characters of the three novels in the focus of this article are all situated very differently in the context of the respective narratives, forcing us to try to understand how and why they connect to the landscapes around them without recourse to generalizations about women and their relationship to nature. Kandre’s Kindchen in Bubins unge, Stridsberg’s Ellen in Happy Sally, and Nordenhök’s Zus in Det vita huset i Simpang exemplify three distinct positions in regard to one’s lived experiences as a young woman. Kindchen is a young girl experiencing her first menstruation in her home marked by poverty and neglect, at a time and place that, according to Witt-Brattström, resemble the Soviet-occupied Estonia. Zus, for her part, is a wealthy girl living in Indonesia in the 1930s surrounded by family and servants. Ellen, again, a mother of two, has already reached middle age and lives the life of the late twentieth century Swedish middle class. Yet, they all are drawn closer and closer to the landscapes they inhabit. In that process, they can also be understood to be searching for a new place, or even creating distance to something, as part of that same movement. All this is in line with what Österholm has noted regarding the portrayal of transitions in novels about girlhood and femininity: the protagonists in them often seek to create dwelling and resting places for themselves, spaces that follow their own rules and language.

In the beginning of Bubins unge, Kindchen is heard describing the garden as her house: “but this here is my house: putrefaction, and the strong heat, the leafy crowding, and the stones!... I now walk into it and lock Onkel out.” The garden, for her, is a space into which she can retreat and where she can watch the other members of her family being left outside of it; it is a space of decomposition and heat, but also of overflowing shrubbery thick enough to hide her body. The garden transforms into a forest that is both caring and dangerous; it provides shelter and berries for the hungry girl, while at the same time it is also a landscape that triggers emotions in her and impacts her body in violent ways. Since the narrative describes
events and happenings that, apparently, coincide with the arrival of Kindchen’s first period, she can be read as a character on the outer limit of girlhood. As Witt-Brattström stresses, the plot in her story follows the contours of an complete menstrual cycle, with all its elements of overripeness and decomposition.23 The girl expresses apprehension towards her own body, asking who this »huge, monstrous girl of flesh, standing in the way of everything« is.24 In the garden, close to the outhouse, she digs a hole in the ground in which she buries her bloodied sheets.25 The following day is the day of the arrival of Unge, a famished child brought to the family’s care and subsequently left under Kindchen’s reluctant supervision. Unge is described as very young and frail, with a shiny blond hair verging on whiteness, all in a slightly problematic contrast to Kindchen’s strong body and dark, almost electric hair.26 When first seeing Unge, Kindchen reflects upon the fact that nothing has yet happened to this child, observing how she bends backwards trying to take in the garden and the forest beyond it with all their vegetation with which Kindchen herself is already so familiar.27 In her article on Kandre’s texts, Widegren has questioned normative, naturalizing assumptions about children’s innocence, while Witt-Brattström, Holmqvist, and Berg have suggested that Unge can be read as the childhood that Kindchen, caught in her transforming, growing body, must leave behind.28 From this point on, the narrative increasingly alternates between modes of dreaming and reality, with the world of Kindchen growing more and more fragile and fragmented.

In The Second Sex, de Beauvoir describes how the adolescent girl, when taking shelter in landscapes, feels that »[f]lesh is no longer filthy: it is joy and beauty«; she is now »an individual rooted in the soil and infinite consciousness … both spirit and life; her presence is imperious and triumphant like that of the earth itself.«29 Like her, Kindchen, in Kandre’s Bübins unge, keeps moving back and forth between the garden, the forest, and the house, searching for places of comfort; yet, whenever she finds one, the comfort quickly fades. Thereby, the fact that she calls the garden her home becomes significant, since doing so implies that even though it was inadequate, even harsh and hostile, to her, it was a landscape for her where she felt embodied and like belonging.

Zus’s garden in Nordenhök’s Det vita huset i Simpang is different from the inhospitable, neglected garden inhabited by Kindchen. It is lush, well planned and taken care of, filled with butterflies and dragonflies.30 A veranda surrounding the big white house where the family lives becomes a bridge between the inner landscape of the house and the outer landscape of the garden. As a white, wealthy child of two European immigrants benefiting from, and in turn contributing to, the imperialist colonial system in Indonesia, Zus is situated in a specific time
and place loaded with political implications. As Davies has observed about the complexity of belonging in colonized landscapes:

“[b]elonging in landscape is a deeply emotional experience, but it is also a political experience. From the point of view of some of those with long histories stretching back through time, their claims hold more weight, more emotional and political weight.”

Accordingly, we may understand Zus’s tending of the garden as an attempt to shape for herself a landscape in which she can belong. There is, however, nothing unique in her efforts in this regard: gardening has for long been recognized as a Western imperialist way of creating places. Ryan, for example, has described the imperialist garden as colonialism on a micro-level, with the landscape shaped after the new inhabitants’ needs and wishes. In the same way, Zus, even though a child still, writes in her journal about her profound feelings of responsibility towards the garden and her family, believing that the garden needs her, but also that her family depends on it for shelter. In her novel, Nordenhök portrays the garden and its fauna in a far more detailed and charged manner than Kandré does in Bübins unge, making us aware of the hand-crafted and planned nature of a landscape where human hands, in this case Zus’s and her mother’s, impose their control and desire on the vegetation as a way of making the place their own, both politically and emotionally. This control, however, remains far from solid and settled, with Zus beginning to experience how it slips through her fingers like a »slithery and mischievous water creature.«

For Ellen in Stridsberg’s Happy Sally, it is, precisely, water that defines the landscape that gives her a sense of belonging. In the novel, she is pictured by her own child as a transparent character always longing for the ocean. Her marriage to Viktor is full of comradeship while, to her, also marked by a struggle between wills and claims to freedom. Together with her family she leaves their home in Sweden for a long voyage over the Atlantic Ocean. Viktor’s dream is to sail from Sweden to the United States, and after a lost bet between the spouses it is indeed decided that the family will undertake the voyage. This is a geographical breakup in the novel that Wahlström has linked to its narrative format, which to a large extent builds on fragmented notes from journals and letters. Once on their way, the narrator, Ellen’s oldest child, recounts how her mother’s longing for the sea draws her further and further away from the family. Her children follow her movements on board of the boat as if they can sense she is drifting away: »[w]hen we have moved between the cabin and deck a few times...
you start to whisk aside flies and water insects. Then you swim far away from the boat.}37 Here, the watery landscape becomes a space of solitude for Ellen, a professional swimmer; while the boat and the seashores the family stops at are places for her children and husband, the water is her zone.

Even though the three novels portray experiences that in some respects are fundamentally different, what is common to all of them is that the protagonist in each case experiences, and struggles with, a need to establish for herself a different space in nature. Driven by a desire for belonging and attachment, Kindchen, Zus, and Ellen all turn to the landscape around them. Their movement towards the latter, however, also suggests a discomfort associated with the place in which they are situated at first, whether this be a young female body in transformation, a neglectful family, a colonial village and it’s surroundings, or an ordinary nuclear family.

--- ENCOUNTERING NATURE ---

How do the three novels illustrate their main characters’ experiences of being in their landscape and how do these relationships between them and the landscape they inhabit affect their bodies and becoming? As Deutscher has argued, the erotic can be found in the ability to experience the world, and de Beauvoir’s writings express precisely this when portraying the world as sensual and open for impressions.36 In Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter, the young girl’s experience of landscape through her senses provides one example, with the narrator retelling the young Simone’s understanding of nature as a place that allows her to experience the world with her body, a body that elsewhere finds itself restrained and defined by others.

In Bübins unge, Kindchen, too, in a similar fashion experiences the landscape with all her senses. Indeed, the narrative in the book puts a notable emphasis on the role of the senses, including touch, taste, and hearing. Kindchen, for instance, hears stones crack underneath the soil and smells the »burnt and dry fragrance« of the trees, with the trees themselves hissing and roaring.39 She navigates through the landscape with all her senses aroused and wide open to the world of vegetation, rocks, and sky. There is an element of immediacy in how Kindchen’s narration is constructed: her words are rendered directly as they are spoken, not mediated through a temporal distance, written records, or contemplated memories as in the other two novels. She tells the story as it happens and the reader relies on her immediate perspective only. As Davies has observed, some literature is written in between landscape and body, blurring the space between the two zones and thus creating a sense of embodiment.40 In Bübins unge, this embodiment is effected through the immediate and introvert narration where Kindchen experiences the landscape through her vision,
taste, hearing, touch, and sense of smell. The space between earth and body is often crossed, as in an episode where Kindchen lies on the ground and sticks her tongue into the soil. As Bennett has argued, the activity of eating blurs the boundaries between the inside and the outside, destabilizing the experience of what each of these is in the subject. At one point, Kindchen describes how "wind arises from the earth. I disappear in this wild thriving! It forces its way into the centre of my skull, to a spot behind the forehead, more and more quietly, and I know that I am this now: neither." Witt-Brattström reads this passage as speaking of a "becoming uterus" where the swelling uterus swallows the mind. Instead of resorting to a symbolic reading that confines itself to the girl's flesh, however, we might understand Kindchen and the wild thriving landscape here as being about just this: a young girl interacting with a landscape. As Kindchen states, she is this "neither", which signals her embodiment, an affective and material state of intermeshing with her surroundings whereby both the inside and the outside, the earth and the body, transform.

There is a noteworthy similarity between the portrayal of vegetation pushing itself through Kindchen's forehead in Kandre's Būbins unge and the way in which Zus recollects her first encounter with her family's garden in Nordenhök's Det vita huset i Simpang. As Zus describes it:

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It all happened so that I, first of all, let the garden come to me. It entered me as a vast space penetrating my chest, forming a place inside my head into which everything would in the end sink or fade; I had to struggle to make room for it inside my body... I received the garden, it became a globe of light right behind my forehead. The task of tending it was bestowed upon me; caring for it was like caring for a small child.

In writing about the garden in her journal, Zus refers to her first encounter with it as a "meeting". In the above quote, she describes how she strategically waits for the garden to take the first step, comparing it to a child that fills up her body before beginning to require care. An embodied experience in the relationship between Zus and the landscape is recounted in the account of how the garden exists inside of the girl, in her chest and behind her forehead; it rushes inside her, and she finds it strenuous to contain it within her. The scene can be read as an illustration of an encounter between actants, one of whom is human and the other one more-than-human; even though Zus states that the garden is given to her, it is all but passive and is described as "a vast space" and "a globe of light", signifying power, tension, and energy. For Zus, the garden, too, is a subject; in the relationship between Zus and the landscape, both
are assigned a subject position in the narrative.

In Stridsberg’s Happy Sally, on the other hand, Ellen begins to feel less and less comfortable the longer the trans-Atlantic voyage takes; it is as if she has been deprived of her right element when above the waterline. Her closeness to water is indicated throughout the novel by expressions she resorts to, such as »waterface«, »watermothers«, and »waterwrists.«6 In the eye of the narrator, there is a kinship between Ellen and water; she is strongly drawn to the lake and the sea, she smells of lakes, and she coughs saltwater.67 Here the embodiment is a feature of the relationship between Ellen and her watery landscape encompassing lakes, canals, and, finally, the ocean. The ocean is also the stage for Ellen’s disappearance: one morning her red bathrobe is found hanging on the boat rail, being all that is left of her corporeal presence. Ellen embodies the notion of a shifting and unrestrained form of water, and her disappearance can be read as an act of dematerialization.68 Importantly, Ellen’s moment of dissolution takes place on the open sea. In Ellen’s relationship with water, the lakes and the canal can be read as metaphors for normative boundaries preventing her growth and transformation as a subject. Even if her merging with water begins already in these watercourses with their clear-cut demarcations, it is only when she reaches the open sea with no such demarcations visible that she is able to fully shift form and begin to embody the landscape.

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**EMBODIMENT AS LOVE**

Thus far, in examining the three novel characters’ experiences of being a body in relation to a landscape and becoming, the concept of love has remained relegated to the background, becoming only implicitly engaged in observations of emotion, affects, and belonging. In The Second Sex, de Beauvoir warns against the kind of love through which women, in their body and soul, lose themselves for the man who becomes the one and only subject.69 In the three novels in this study, however, one finds approximations of a heteronormative abolishing of romantic relationships, with their portrayals of women and landscapes that appear to run counter to the notion of nature as something passive, bestowing upon it a measure of agency and power instead. At the same time, to be sure, it is also possible to view the relationship between nature and women through a dualistic lens, with the concomitant risk of sexualizing and gendering landscape, protagonists, and the relationships between these two. The organic landscapes in the novels of Kandre, Nordenhök, and Stridsberg are, however, spaces in nature. Turning to the notion of love as an affective energy may then help to avoid imposing an anthropocentric view on the intimate relationships involving them.

Kindchen, Zus, and Ellen all experience states of embodiment
and strong emotional bonds in their relationship to the landscapes they inhabit. These embodiments, however, tend to vacillate between a sensual experience of belonging and closeness within a landscape on the one hand, and a destructive tendency to become completely absorbed into that landscape on the other hand. This is in line with a material ecocritical understanding of matter as something that is simultaneously creative and destructive, as in the case of bacteria that mean growth for one species and fatal disease for another. In the domains of art and aesthetics and in the more theoretical literature in the field, the balancing act between creation and de-creation in love between human subjects has been a recurring topic, with numerous novels, poems, essays, and articles examining the impact and consequences of unrequited love, passion, and power relations and abuse in relationships.

What, then, in the intricate entanglement of these human characters and their surrounding landscapes can be perceived as indicative of elements of love? The relationships between the two are in many respects of a very tactile kind, which already can lead one’s thoughts to love when reading the novels. Kindchen, Zus, and Ellen are all portrayed as sensing physical closeness to the natural elements, which, indeed, is sometimes, as in the case of Ellen, longed for with the intensity of desire. This closeness, moreover, is often associated with at least a degree of boundary crossing, or a sense of being enmeshed with the landscape in ways that create affection and energy, whether positive or destructive. In her Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter, de Beauvoir describes the young Simone's overwhelming experiences of being a body without clearly defined boundaries when moving freely in the landscapes of southern France. She, the young girl, claims she is the scent of wheat, the heat, and that she remains heavy even though she evaporates into the atmosphere. In doing so, the girl's quality of being flesh in fact becomes the link connecting her to the world, enabling her to experience the latter with all her senses. Here there is a noteworthy contrast between Simone's experiences and those Kindchen describes herself as having in Bübins unge: both of them can be seen as busy forming an assemblage with their surroundings, in a process that is deeply personal, intimate, and profound for their lives and processes of becoming. Nevertheless, while Simone declares all that she finds herself becoming, Kindchen states herself to become neither. There are transformations happening in both narratives, but in Kindchen’s case embodying the landscape is far more dangerous for the subject, with, as Holmqvist has argued, the elasticity and uncertainty of the protagonist’s I resulting in consequences that are destructive in nature. While Kindchen remains physically intact as a body, the landscape grows further and deeper inside her, producing...
chao. For her, the process of embodying vegetation is a violent one and leaves no room for distance, no room for breathing; as Berg has put it, the vegetation is eating its way into her body, into its origin.52

Zus’s geographical intermeshment with the garden in *Det vita huset i Simpang*, on the other hand, is only temporary. In her journal, Zus writes of her inability to any longer tell where she herself ends and where the garden begins. She is, however, separated from the lush vegetation just before it absorbs her completely: her mother decides to bring her back to Sweden, and the physical landscape is left behind in Indonesia. What remains of it for Zus are memories and her journal, with her relationship with the landscape becoming merely a memory of an affair experienced as both pleasantly sensual and painful. The same, however, is not true of Ellen in *Happy Sally*, who, as already indicated, in the end permanently disappears into the vast ocean. The plot emphasizes the necessity of this outcome, preparing the reader for it by constantly bringing up the link between the Ellen and the water as something tending towards dematerialization, ethereality, and mutual belongingness.

Initially, the landscapes in all these cases offer the protagonist a sense of belonging and freedom into which the characters can withdraw and even hide, helping them to transform into a different shape and role. They all experience physical contact and closeness with their landscape and find in themselves an ability to take in their surroundings with all their senses, learning to perceive both their own body and that of the landscape through the materiality of the two. Perhaps it is within this context that I can understand my own experiences described above as a young girl: the landscapes were vast enough to contain my emotions and imagination, but also miniaturistic enough for me to feel connected and safe. The relationships here, to be sure, are not about authentic love, about the kind of granting of mutual freedom and transcendence that de Beauvoir speaks of, but they nevertheless build upon emotional connections whereby both parties contribute to crucial experiences of being embodied for the young women in question. This, however, does not come about owing to some biological connectedness to nature that women by nature would have, but rather because of the landscapes’ ability to offer them alternative kind of intimate bonds and spaces that help them to more freely and genuinely feel, touch, and become. This function of spaces as sheltering hideaways for feminized protagonists was already alluded to above. However, as Östeholm has stressed, in narratives of this type it nevertheless almost always occurs a breakup between the girls or women, and the places they inhabit, at the end of the novels.53 Sometimes this separation is brutal, as in the case of Ellen in *Happy Sally*, who, we may presume, dies, and of Bübins unge in which
we are confronted with escalating violence, while in other cases it is less dramatic, yet equally profound, as for Zus.

In conclusion, one might return to de Beauvoir and her significance for material ecocritical theory. As a philosopher and writer, her enquiries into bodily experience and the nature of femininity should be recommended reading for anyone interested in how that which is corporeal can impact notions of nature and vegetation. As we have seen above, moreover, proceeding from a framework inspired by her analyses also invites critical reflection on power, class, embodiment, and sexuality in relation to the material and more-than-human world, a topic that, importantly, today shows its relevance to extend beyond gender-specific analyses to also embrace a broader set of problems having to do with our anthropocentric relationship to nature and the increasingly fragile ecosystem in which we continue, at least for now, to live.

ENDNOTES

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1 Mare Kandre: Bübins unge (Stockholm, 2010 [1987]), 24; all translations from the original Swedish by the author.
4 Beauvoir: The Second Sex, 163.
5 Beauvoir: The Second Sex, 89, 163.
7 Chandra Talpade Mohanty: »Under western eyes: feminist scholarship and colonial discourses« in boundary 2, 12.3 (1984), 349.
10 Beauvoir: The Second Sex, 374, 376 p.
11 Bronwyn Davies: (In)scribing Body/Landscape Relations (Walnut Creek, 2000), 23.
Johanna Lindbo, »Sensual Grass Touching Humid Skin«

12 Jamaica Kincaid: My Garden (Book) (New York, 2001 [1999]), 137
15 Beauvoir: The Second Sex, 694 p., 706.
18 Bennett: Vibrant Matter, 9.
22 Kandre: Būbins unge, 20.
24 Kandre: Būbins unge, 39.
25 Kandre: Būbins unge, 38.
26 Kandre: Būbins unge, 45, 23, 147.
27 Kandre: Būbins unge, 45.
28 Kajsa Widegren: »Flickskildring som får Dantes inferno att verka glättigt. Mottagandet av Mare Kandres Aliide, Aliide«, in Eva Söderberg, Mia Österlund and Bodil Formark (eds.): Flicktion. Perspektiv på flickan i fiktionen (Malmö, 2013), 137; Jenny Holmqvist: »I dag kan jag inte se mig själv‘ – om Mare Kandre, dubbelgångare och läckande jag« in Kritiker 14: 31-32 (2014); Witt-Brattström: »Det ler så mörkt i skogen«, 263; Aase Berg »Efterord«, in Mare Kandre: Būbins unge (Stockholm, 2010), 152.
29 Beauvoir: The Second Sex, 376.
31 Davies: (In)scribing body, 39.
32 Ryan: »The nineteenth-century garden«, 123.
34 Nordenhök: *Det vita huset i Simpang*, 164.
35 Sara Stridsberg: *Happy Sally* (Stockholm, 2004).
37 Stridsberg: *Happy Sally*, 119.
40 Davies: *(In)scribing body*, 235.
42 Bennett: *Vibrant Matter*, 49.
43 Kandre: *Bübins unge*, 23.
46 Stridsberg: *Happy Sally*, 43.
47 Stridsberg: *Happy Sally*, 41, 70.
49 Beauvoir: *The Second Sex*, 684.
51 Holmqvist: »I dag kan jag inte se mig själv«, 10.
53 Österholm: *Ett flicklaboratorium i valda bitar*, 284.