

Foreword

This edited collection is the result of a collaborative research project entitled “Intimate Readings: Literary Negotiations of Affective and Gendered Belongings,” funded by the Elisabeth-List-Fellowship Program at the University of Graz. Our project, akin to this book, was designed to facilitate conversations about the valence of affect theory for a better understanding of how narratives of gender and sexuality can depict and foster a sense of belonging. Through our systematic investigation of the intersections between affect theory and literary theory, we found that narratives across different media employ unique strategies of affective interpellation, on the level of representation as well as on the level of reception. We have come to think of this as affective worldmaking. In this collection, we present the results of our theorizations on these intersections, alongside a collection of essays by a diverse range of scholars who explore the potential for and limitations of affective worldmaking in various forms and modes of narration through the lens of their respective disciplinary, theoretical, cultural, and political backgrounds. In the process, they invite us to reflect on different modes of affective worldmaking as well as potential disciplinary challenges and competing concepts that arise from and in their respective fields of study or current research areas.

In this way, this collection represents both an outgrowth and extension of our collaboration and of the affective and intellectual impulses and insights that emerged in the course of our online symposium “Affective Worldmaking: Narrative Counterpublics of Gender and Sexuality” (January 14th-15th, 2021), during which we had the chance to discuss

our ideas with many of the contributors to this volume. Indeed, the affective and intellectual momentum of this symposium also reverberates throughout the radio series “Gender, Affect, and Politics,” which we produced for the show *genderfrequenz* (Gender Frequency), of the Graz-based independent radio station Radio Helsinki. You can access the series by using the QR code in the final chapter. We are grateful for the opportunity to use their airwaves to present our discussions of affective worldmaking in the context of gender discrimination, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia to an audience outside of our academic bubble and for the chance this offered us to practice a little affective worldmaking ourselves.

In a similar vein, this edited collection has been a worldmaking endeavor in its own right. During the societal, social, and interpersonal upheaval of the COVID-19 pandemic, this project allowed us to establish and reinvigorate new and existing interrelationships between affect and literary studies and discover new ways of affective worldmaking both on a theoretical and an interpersonal level. And like the pandemic itself, it has required everybody involved to deal with unfamiliar terrain seemingly far-removed from habitual grooves. That being said, affective worldmaking also gained another dimension of meaning for us during the pandemic. As scholars of affect theory, we could not help but notice how our own lived experiences and practices changed, how the pace and sequence of our discussion meetings and the feelings of community that arose through them shifted and morphed, as we were forced to adopt new, socially distanced forms of working together. Indeed, what began as a project conceived in cozy Austrian cafés and envisioned as a series of social events with local and international collaborators was unexpectedly transformed into online encounters and occasional, socially distanced coffee meetings in the frosty backyards of Graz, an experience that was both marked by stasis and uncertainty, over- and underwhelmedness, distance, and intimacy, both in our academic routines and personal interactions. Thus, our collaborative efforts were, to a large extent, characterized by our desire to *do* affective worldmaking in our own contexts and put our ideas about its potentials into practice, both in our personal and professional lives, in order to make sense of our

experiences and emotions and to reclaim moments of connection and commonality.

The beginnings of our project and the onset of the pandemic coincided. Yet, in addition to voicing our frustrations with this new experience of isolation, our meetings and discussions also became spaces of productive encounter and healing that broke the monotony of social distancing, thereby opening up new opportunities for connection, in the spirit of affect studies' tradition of "reparative practice," both within our research group and with our collaborators, as we edited their texts and recognized, empathized, and shared their frustrations and anxieties in the face of these unforeseen circumstances. At the same time, however, we found relief in their honesty and vulnerability.

In the spirit of honesty, vulnerability, and connection, we would like to take this opportunity to not only thank both institutions but especially the people who supported and worked with us under these uncertain circumstances to turn this project into a wonderful communal journey of affective and intellectual exploration. We want to thank the University of Graz and especially the Coordination Center for Gender Studies and Equal Opportunities for funding our project: in particular, Barbara Hey and Lisa Scheer for their gracious and invaluable logistical and personal support in making this project a reality, promoting our research, and their tireless support of gender and sexuality studies at the University of Graz. We are also indebted to Diana Brunnthaler for lending us her audio-editing and suturing skills for our radio series and making us sound better than we could have ever imagined, as well as to Aline Franzus and Chris Wahlig for their editorial work on this collection, especially their careful reading and meticulous formatting.

