

Foreword/Avant-propos

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Marie Carrière is Director of the Canadian Literature Centre at the University of Alberta, where she also teaches English and French. Her work on feminist writing in Canada and Québec appears in various journal articles and book chapters. Her latest book is *Médée protéiforme* (University of Ottawa Press, 2012) and she is co-editor, with Patricia Demers, of *Regenerations: Women's Writing in Canada* (University of Alberta Press, 2014).

Affect, Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (2010) tell us, “is persistent proof of a body’s never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world’s obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations” (1). If we accept this definition, then women’s writing in Canada, and *écriture au féminin* in Québec, have always been *about* affect: in the sense both of *regarding* or being *with reference to* affect, and of indicating a *movement within* or *various directions* of affect. Women’s writing in Canada is *about* affect when it problematizes gendered, racialized, or sexualized bodies. It is *about* affect when it performs vulnerability, resistance, and queerness; when it represents the immersion of bodies in material reality and in language; and, ultimately, when it expresses ways in which these bodies inform literary expression.

I can’t help but notice that this special issue of *Atlantis* comes at a time of revival in mainstream feminism, with the increased visibility of feminist activism on social media, in popular culture, or on a global scale. It also comes at a very non-feminist and indeed anti-feminist time, when cultural and political backlash against feminist ideas and activism is at an all-time high. Finally, this issue also comes at a time in feminist literary and critical history (our current one) that I call metafeminist (Carrière 2016). Initially used by Lori Saint-Martin in the 1990s, metafeminism denotes paradigmatic turns and shifts in women’s writing, whereby feminist ideas have become less explicit than they were a few decades ago in women’s texts produced in Canada and Québec. But, feminism is still there, and it is still here. In other words, several women writers in Canada and Québec may appear less unequivocal in their political or theoretical outlooks than their (second-wave?) predecessors. Whether writing from a cis, queer, trans, racialized, or what they recognize as a privileged white position, they are no less ethically engaged with alternative visions of social transformation spawned by feminist thought. Wading through the torrent of constant societal and cultural backlash, feminism is still doing its

work. It does it differently and perhaps more dispersedly than in decades past.

In assessing the state or consequences of feminism in the twenty-first century, several critics have underlined what I would call this metafeminist moment. “Women need not be the explicit object of debate for us to deploy our analytics of power to useful effect” (8), Joan Scott (2002) argues. In turn, Misha Kavka (2001) reminds us that “feminist thinking may now *stretch beyond* ‘women’ or even gender as categories and as delimiting objects of investigation [but] it does not, however, mean leaving these categories behind” (xxi; my emphasis).

Just as such terms like globalization, transnationalism, diaspora, and now neoliberalism have more or less refurbished terms like postmodernism, multiculturalism, and postcolonialism in our critical *parler* (Cvetkovitch 2012, loc. 316, par. 1), metafeminism as a term attempts to update our historical sense of feminism’s shifting epistemologies and practices. And “so it is,” as Sara Ahmed (2004) powerfully argues, “when feminism is no longer directed towards a critique of patriarchy, or secured by the categories of ‘women’ or ‘gender,’ that it is doing the most ‘moving’ work. *The loss of such an object is not the failure of feminist activism, but is indicative of its capacity to move, or to become a movement*” (176).

Let’s now return to affect. The movement that Ahmed (2004) describes above has informed recent scholarship engaged with affect studies. And here, the “time” of feminism, so to speak, is of essence. “The subject of feminism” has been conceptualized “as embodied, located and relational” (Koivunen 2000, 8) in the work of a number of affect theorists including Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, Rosi Braidotti, Teresa Brennan, and Ann Cvetkovich. While the turn to affect in feminist theory may indicate the “search of a new critical vocabulary” (Koivunen 2000, 8), the focus on affect is also recognizably *in continuation with* the long history of feminism’s ongoing engagement with ethics, ontology, and the material conditions of identity and subjectivity. Recent momentum in the scholarship on affect is often talked about in terms of an “affective turn,” as coined by cultural theorist Patricia Clough in 2010. Such talk, as Anu Koivunen (2000) argues, is “to ignore generations of feminist scholarship on articulating subjective and social experiences of injustices” (22). Koivunen

(2010) urges us to consider “the long history of feminist engagement with psychoanalysis,” for example, or theories of the “passionate subject” (22) in the work of Julia Kristeva, Jessica Benjamin, Teresa de Lauretis, and Kaja Silverman. Indeed: “The question of affect and the reflexive link between ontology and epistemology were always already there in feminist self-consciousness” (Koivunen 2010, 23).

Returning now to the shift in the political tendencies and aesthetic practices of women’s writing in Canada today, I’d like to propose that the study of affect can help us grapple with some of these transformations. Convergences between English- and French-language feminist poetics were perhaps arguably more visible in the 1970s and early 1980s than those that meet the critical eye today. Formal experimentation and sexual politics fuelled the writing of a number of Anglophone and Francophone women (Daphne Marlatt, Lola Lemire Tostevin, Nicole Brossard, to name just a few) which focused on theories of intersubjectivity and corporeality. This was the stuff of affect, to be sure, which European and American feminist thinkers (Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray) were in turn delving into. These so-called radical feminist poetics came to give way either to more personal or intimate forms of writing or to interventions in colonial, multicultural, and national rhetoric (Dionne Brand, Nadine Ltaif). However, feminism in Canadian writing today—and the centrality of affect especially in the form of private and public intimacy—is as pertinent as ever.

As this special issue is about to demonstrate under the perceptive editorial vision of Libe García Zarranz and Evelyne Ledoux-Beaugrand, feminism in Canadian writing (by Nalo Hopkinson, Larissa Lai, Catherine Mavrikakis, Kim Thúy, and in the creative work of transgender poet Lucas Crawford featured here) no longer thinks (if it even ever did think) in just local or national terms. The oppression of minorities, women, and nature, as well as the ill effects of neoliberal attachments to scripts of happiness or the ‘good life’ must fall more than ever under the scrutiny of feminism’s longstanding methodologies of analysis and critique. With keen and growing interest in global crisis in women’s writing—environmental collapse, social inequality, state and biopolitical surveillance, heteronormative backlash—critics (Ledoux-Beaugrand, García Zarranz, Amelia DeFalco, Dominique Héту, Sina Queyras) increasingly turn

to material and queer theory, posthumanism, and the ethics of care to engage with these works.

Let me just end with this. As a literary practice, feminism confronts and resists the current global and post-9/11 brutalities and inequalities that besiege us. Feminist theory, Ahmed (2017) reminds us in *Living a Feminist Life*, is after all “world making” (loc. 330, par. 3). More than ever, we need feminism which, like the body, has the “capacity to affect and be affected” (Gregg and Seigworth 2010, 2).

Feminism is an ethos for our time.

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