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Performing Emotions: Historical and Anthropological Sites of Affect



Connecting Emotions. Contributions from Cultural History

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In this article I shall focus on contributions from cultural history, being aware that there are many other points of view in the field of the study of emotions. If I insist on cultural historical methodology, it is not because I privilege it above everything else, but because, on the contrary, I trust that exchanges between various disciplinary approaches are possible and fruitful, and because I have had cultural history very much at heart in the last few years.

The first part of my title, “connecting emotions”, is meant in a double sense. In a first meaning, the task undertaken by cultural history in the last 30 years has been to establish unseen or unusual connections between different disciplines and between various objects of history – including emotions – on the one hand, and texts and contexts on the other. Such connections are not meant in a simple sense, but rather in an indirect and sometimes contradictory one. As Stuart Hall has noticed, cultural studies and history must learn to coexist with the tension between the text and its connections with the world of experience and with institutions.¹ This is intrinsic to the displacement that is typical of the concept of culture, in the recognition of the nature of textuality and of the fact that culture is today a component of consumption. Hall invites us, following Edward Said, to coexist with the tension between the text and the world out there: “out there people are dying” is the type of awareness and emotion that in recent years has motivated many scholars to change their vision and practice of cultural history. The new cultural history is a product of two converging processes:

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firstly, an attraction of disciplines to common work on specific themes or areas, thus blurring the boundaries between them; and, secondly, the transformation of politics, carrying its own emotions, into cultural action and new trends of historical study, such as women's history, black history, gay history, and so on.

Another meaning of the first part of the title refers to emotions that connect. Since emotions is a gigantic field, a universe where all sorts of objects of study but also of different disciplinary approaches can be found, my title intends to point to a precise choice, of studying emotions that establish connections. I shall illustrate both meanings using other scholars' and my own recent work.

I share with the editors of *Historia* the conviction that the concept of 'emotion' has become topical on the agenda of academic research as well as in social and political endeavours during the last – they say 20, I would say 40 – years. Forty because, in my periodisation, the new social movements at the end of the 1960s and the cultural changes in the following decade are the starting point of a general twist in the humanities towards new themes and approaches, including the attention to emotions. To some extent, cultural history stems from a defeat, a political defeat in the 1970s which it transforms into an asset; this is the origin of its oblique approach to politics, through culture. I also agree that in recent decades international crises have brought out personal and collective forms of emotional manifestations and at the same time, these decades have been those of the recognition of individual and collective new forms of subjectivity. In this context, the study of emotions and the examination of questions related to them is pertinent not only to academic research but also has reverberations on cultural and political action.

Connecting emotions and texts

The gaze of the researching subject has established some major connections between emotions and other fields of study and aspects of life. Among them, I consider of primary importance the connection between emotions and text, especially the specific text which is discourse. For what concerns my own research, I was always clear that I was working on love discourses and not directly on emotions. The connection between love discourses, love practices and sentiments, is both close and complex. The famous saying by La Rochefoucauld that we would fall in love less often had we not heard so much talk about love, testifies to the reciprocal implication of the two poles, emotion and discourse, and the constant tension that exists between them. One of the protagonists of my forthcoming book, *Love and the Idea of Europe*,² is Leo Ferrero, a young and brilliant Italian intellectual who died at the age of 30, in 1933, as a result of a car accident in Mexico. In his reflections about love, he wrote that the youth of his generation were more and more trying to simulate in the field of emotions the love discourses fashionable at the time. The author of this ante litteram Baudrillardian remark was one of the supporters of the idea that love as a passion is a specificity of Europe as a result of Christianity – a concept later developed and complicated by Denis de Rougemont in *L'amour et l'Occident* – but believed so without any triumphalism; on the contrary, he regretted that this fact made Europeans very unhappy, to the extent that he had decided, had death not interrupted his plans, to move to the Orient to find new ways of living and loving.

Contrary to these essentialising positions, what I believe has been specifically European in the last three centuries is not the emotion of falling in love in itself, which can be found in many other cultures of the world, but the fact of constructing a self-representation in which love has a prominent role. Suffice it to think of the interwar debate on the crisis of European civilisation, which according to so many commentators then was due to or in any case connected with the crisis of the couple – the heterosexual couple (but nothing much changes if we also include the homosexual couple in this reasoning). Moving the idea of the Europeaness of courtly and romantic love from a substantive level to the level of self-representation historicises and de-essentialises it, and treats it as a cultural construction belonging to a specific period in European history, from the 1770s to the 1960s.

If emotions and discourse are strictly connected, when we study love discourses we get some insights in the emotions expressed, enabling us to at least formulate hypotheses on how love was experienced in that particular time and place. For historians this means that we can study emotions only in the form they manifest themselves. Sources therefore assume a particular importance for us in understanding how we can treat them in order to reach hypotheses on emotions.

We can call psychoanalysis to our rescue, from a direction that I consider one of the most interesting developments of psychoanalytical and medical psychiatric research in various schools of thought, i.e., hermeneutics and narration. To give one telling example, I shall use the work of Giuseppe Martini, a psychiatrist in Rome, for whom any analysis of the texts produced by the interaction between patients and analysts must be counterbalanced by taking into account the emotional flow between them, a flow that is not always expressed in a linguistic code. Dr Martini narrates the moving story of Manuela, a young woman who could no longer speak, much to everyone's frustration, but with the loving care of his team Manuela finally felt part of the emotional flow around her, succeeding in expressing rancour and rage against the world – a healthy reaction, the end of her indifference and silence. But the team could not even claim that they had fully understood what had happened in the emotional process around and with Manuela. Therefore, with other therapists, Dr Martini insists on the contemporaneity of the verbal and the non-verbal, and on the fact that the former is a particular mirror of the latter, and as such must be treated.³

I think that I had precisely the same problem of decodification – and everybody studying emotions I believe does – with documents testifying emotions. These have been in my case mainly love letters, which you all know are full of stereotypes, especially in the exordium and the farewell, but not only stereotypes; they also contain many coded messages that sometimes we only partially understand. We need, every time we read a letter, to develop a microanalysis of that specific source, considered in the context of the whole correspondence as well as of the historical situation in which it is placed. Thus my work has been to reconstruct the specific context, for instance in the case of the correspondence between a couple, a so-called mixed couple, composed by a Jewish Italian woman and a Jewish German man, in the 1930s and 1940s. Their letters to each other are full of love expressions, sometimes coded, but also of statements that they feel European at the very time when Jews were being persecuted and chased out of Europe. The temporal and spatial context is Nazi-Fascist Europe in the decade immediately preceding the Second World War as well as the differences between Italy and Germany at the time; then comes the context of the Bolivian exile; but

the cultural context is also – importantly – the European humanistic cultural tradition. The letters are full of references to poets and writers as well as to music and theatre considered to be highly European. Other types of contextualisation are offered by the documents that the couple gave to various archives, illustrating their life, such as other letters, photographs, lists of objects taken into exile, and so on. Finally an important contextualisation is constituted by the debate ongoing in Europe at the time on the Europeaness of Jews. This case-study conveys very clearly the sense of how emotions can shape a new self: it was through reciprocal love that the couple developed a European sense of belonging, the man enlarging his Mitteleuropean identity to one including the Mediterranean, and the woman building upon her Italian identity and her vast European culture and continental identification. They both reached a new vision of being Jews on the basis of the reciprocal recognition of different ways of being such. And finally, the sense of being European was strengthened by the emotion of nostalgia in Latin America.

In another case, that of the multiple love letters to numerous women lovers written by the same Leo Ferrero I have already mentioned – as well as of the letters to and from his male friends – I had to take into account not only the socio-cultural and political situation in Italy and France, where he was obliged to go because his family was threatened by Fascism and he could not find a job in Italy, but also other aspects. One aspect of the decodification has been the attention to the material aspect of the love letter, which constitutes another kind of text: letters of mauve and lilac paper, sometimes perfumed, with large or nervous writing on it, with flowers or photographs inserted in the envelope – all details that would have been lost in a typed transcription and that I consider emblematic of the emotional flow that is expressed in ways different from words. All this helps us to understand the specific mirror of emotions, to quote Martini, that the letter is.

A second aspect in the process of deconstructing the stereotypes has been in this case the awareness of the multiplicity of gender; Leo Ferrero's letters would be only superficially comprehensible without such awareness. In order to understand what gendering emotions can mean, I will now go into a brief digression. It is very difficult to speak about emotions: you cannot grasp them and pin them down, they are an elusive object. In order to thematise this difficulty, I propose a procedure of coming and going between the object and its many contexts. My first digression will refer to some recent acquisitions in this field, starting with a quotation from *Undoing Gender* by Judith Butler: "to assume that gender always and exclusively means the matrix of the 'masculine' and 'feminine' is precisely to miss the critical point that the production of that coherent binary is contingent, that it comes at a cost, and that those permutations of gender which do not fit the binary are as much a part of gender as its most normative instance".⁴ In this perspective, gendering emotions cannot mean simply attributing emotions to women and men, masculine and feminine, because gender is much more, as the acronym for the GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual) movements reminds us.

Secondly, one must be careful of what gendering can mean in the present global context. We should bear in mind, for instance, some results of the recent work in gendering migration. The ambivalence intrinsic in the category of gender has emerged clearly in these researches, which show that gender is a crucial way to the hybridations that make integration possible, but that at the same time in many cases women migrants confirm their roles as "guardians of the race".

The construction of multiple belongings is *at once* ethnicised, racialised and gendered, and gender acts as the key stabilising principle, for example, reinstating, in the case of Italian migrants to Britain, the equation between Italianness, Europeaness and whiteness.⁵ Recent research in this field confirms the ambivalence of the role of gender in complex systems of oppression, in which gender is by no means simply a category presiding to liberation, but rather the basis of both being oppressed and contributing to oppress others.

To conclude this digression on gendering, I will use Rosi Braidotti's latest book, *Transpositions*, which strongly accuses "gender mainstreaming" of having turned out to be an anti-feminist mechanism that increases differences in status, access and entitlement among women, and supports the dominant discourse that Western, Christian, white or whitened women are already liberated, while women who are non-Western, mostly non-white and alien to the Enlightenment tradition, need to be targeted by the West for special emancipatory or even belligerent action.⁶

This digression on gendering emotions is an example of the many steps away from the objects of study and texts that we must take in order to understand their meanings in various contexts. Now we can see some important aspects of the case-study concerning Leo Ferrero by noticing that his letters hint at a feminine component of his personality in his friendship and love relations as well as in his family ones. This observation could have been done without the digression, but it might have had a pathological undertone; now we can accept this feature as a valuable and relevant aspect of Ferrero's identity. He did not try to hide this feature, and therefore we can consider it as the object of a conscious gender choice that he made in his coming to terms with the stereotypes on masculinity that his age and his family transmitted to him.

Let me conclude this first part of my contribution by saying that if cultural history is, as I believe it to be, a history of forms of subjectivity, we cannot understand subjectivity unless we see emotions as constituents of it. Memory, which is a form of subjectivity, would not exist without its emotional undertones and components, and the same applies to identity, of course. For instance, when we talk about European identity, what we mean is not only an intellectual and political engagement, but also an affective investment towards being European, and being European cannot exist without feeling such, even if this entails sometimes contradictory sentiments. This has been observed for both individuals and collectives. Love for one's country is another example, and certainly an affective sense of national or regional belonging has always been a component of subjectivity, in which 'perversions' may be found, if we can take this word in a non-moralistic sense. I am thinking of the analyses according to which Fascisms and present-day racisms are not understandable only in social, political and economic terms, but must be explained at an emotional level, on the basis of the projection of hopes and desires on a leader figure, and of frustrations and repressions on a designated enemy.

While I have been talking mainly about discourse, I have in mind a larger category of texts. The most recent development on the frontier of new sources – new texts – no longer concerns orality, but rather visuality, and the sessions on visual representations and on art at the Historein conference on emotions have fully confirmed this. One of the challenges facing historians today – especially for what concerns subjectivity – is finding historical interpretations of moving as well

as still visual sources (from all media, including the internet). This requires new techniques, new philology, and the understanding of the processes that are going on in the world of communication today. In this regard, I find useful the work being carried out by neurophysiologist Giacomo Rizzolatti and philosopher of science Corrado Sinigaglia in Parma, who discovered mirror neurons: these are neurons that are activated when we watch somebody performing an action – then the mirror neurons in our body act in a similar way to the neurons active in the person who performs the action.⁷ This means that we learn mainly through empathy and imitation, but especially by sight, than language. Therefore, visibility is crucial in studying emotions. Not by chance, I have in recent years turned to cinema as a useful source for studying Europe and love.

Cinema is an indispensable source for allowing us to perceive some of the non-verbal aspects of emotions to which Dr Martini referred. Through filmic sources we can understand the value of gesture and body expression in emotions, an understanding that cannot be referred directly to experience, but which must be decoded through the specific language of cinematic expression. This requires a philological critique comparable to the one we apply, with other decoding procedures, to texts such as oral sources or personal letters. Moreover, cinema always presents more than one level of understanding; the hidden or latent message – which is not articulated at the level of verbal expression or of the plot – is transmitted through images in such a way that it is sometimes contrary to the apparent meaning. This is the case, for instance, of homosexual undertones that are never made explicit in a heterosexual story. Thus, we can infer some non-verbal aspects of emotions that might never be articulated in words, but that are no less important because of this.

Emotions that connect

In the first section of this paper attention was given to the gaze of the scholar creating connections. Not that the gaze of the researcher is not relevant to this second section, since in the end all connections must be seen by somebody in order to be thematised, but I want to consider now the objectual capacity to connect is intrinsic in emotions, therefore stressing their social nature. Here too I have two fields of application: my and others' work.

Mine comes again from my decades-long research on Europe and love.⁸ In this research, emotions have been studied – not only by myself, but also by an international group of scholars at the Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut, Essen, from 2002 to 2004 – for their capacity to connect the public and the private spheres, Europe being the public and the love of the couple being the private. In fact, the title of the collective volume growing out of this research project will be *Europe and Love: New Dangerous Liaisons*, comprising of writings by junior and senior scholars, such as Jack Goody, Bill Reddy, Alf Lüdtke, Jo Labanyi and Svetlana Slapsak, and referring to many European countries, among which France, Germany, Italy, Britain, Poland, Spain, Portugal, the Balkan countries and Russia, as well as to the whole of Europe in its relationships with the Arab world, Africa and the USA.⁹ In our work, rather than taking for granted simplistic divisions and assumed connections, we have tried to establish new ways of seeing the dyad of Europe and love, looking for latent and 'dangerous' aspects. Among the latent ones are the ties connecting networks of people and texts working at a certain time on Europe and love. Thus we have dis-

covered networks of people who believed, in different ways, that a united Europe was not possible without new forms of love between individuals – for instance, for Giorgio Quartara it was a Europe inspired by Freemasonry on the one hand and liberated love and sex on the other; for the *Cahiers du Sud* and the group of intellectuals and artists around this review in Marseille, in the 1930s and 1940s, it was a Europe going back to the roots of Mediterranean civilisation, uniting Christians, Jews and Muslims; for Leo Ferrero, it was the federated Europe proposed by Aristide Briand at the League of Nations that could learn ways of loving from the Orient and Central America; and for other people it was the European dimension they came to understand through the experience of love uniting a couple across different cultures, countries and languages.¹⁰

In all these cases, the power of intimacy and its reverberations on the public go hand in hand with a trend that has appeared in the queer line of thought in the USA, which problematises the public/private distinction and does not nourish the identitary claim of gay studies. This is another digression, again indicating that in order to study emotions we are pushed into multiple directions of research. The problematisation of the public sphere requires a radical redefinition of its relationship with the private, including the intimate, as conceptualised by Habermas (although I wish to stress the fact that in Habermas' thought the public/private category was never a dichotomy but rather a polarity pervading the whole of society and going through the home, thus creating three areas: at the extremes, those of public power and the private-intimate sphere of the bourgeois family, while at the centre were the political – public sphere, the literary – public sphere and the market of cultural goods). Some feminist theory has too quickly disposed of the divide: Joan Scott in 1988 claimed that the politics of gender dissolves the distinction between public and private, while Nancy Fraser on the contrary pointed out the advantages of keeping and reformulating it in its different meanings.¹¹

Now, queer thought as exemplified by the texts of Lauren Berlant, Ann Cvetkovich and Michael Warner, among others, have engaged in the effort to keep open the definition of what constitutes a public in order to remain alert to forms of affective life that have not solidified into institutions, organisations or identities. Cvetkovich has shown that affective life can be seen to pervade public life, and structures of affect that constitute cultural experience can serve as the foundation for public culture. She also rejects the relegation of the sexual to the domain of the private sphere, looking instead for the public dimensions of sexuality.¹²

Both Berlant and Warner have denounced the ideology of intimacy in the dominant US discourse on the proper relation between public and private, a discourse of the privatisation of citizenship, based on an opinion culture characterised by strong patriotic identification, mixed with feelings of practical political powerlessness, a patriotically permeated pseudo-public sphere, rooted in traditional notions of home, family and community.

In the changes of the boundaries between public and private there is, I believe, a specificity of Europe. My contention is that in this continent public/intimate relationships are being questioned and changed by the recent waves of migration: bodies moving through European territory, following affective ties of relatives and friends, bodies gendered in a multiple way; subjects that often do not have a public sphere in a proper sense, being clandestine, and not even a private way

of life, living where they can, but establishing new forms of communications, involving Europe in one of the diasporic public spheres that Arjun Appadurai has theorised.¹³

This end of my second digression, on the connecting role of emotions between the public and the private/intimate spheres, leads us directly to the final part of my paper, concerning the relation between Europe and other continents. One of the findings of our research on Europe and love has been a critique of Eurocentrism in the field of passions as found in the claim, centuries old, that Europeans invented courtly and romantic love and exported it to the world. Our approach proved useful in questioning on this basis many cultural products, from literary and political texts to films, as well as our own feelings and beliefs concerning the hidden Eurocentrism of passions. In this respect I find seminal the work done in postcolonial studies, for instance by Dipesh Chakrabarty, Paul Gilroy and Leela Gandhi. Suffice it to evoke the importance of the heart (*hridaya*) in Chakrabarty's analysis, entitled *Provincialising Europe*, of the change of attitudes towards widow burning in India (*sati*) and the struggle to make it illegal: he writes about "compassion, the emotion we feel for the misery of others", quoting Adam Smith and Hume, adding, "it is on the basis of this kind of understanding that Rammohun Roy and Iswarchandra Vidyasagar assigned to reason a critical role in fighting the effects of custom. Reason did not produce the sentiment of compassion; it simply helped in letting sentiments take their natural course by removing the obstacle of mindless custom."¹⁴ It was in reading these lines that I had the perception of how suffering can be a type of subjectivity, in the sense of the unspoken suffering of another in whom compassion recognises the fact of being a subject.

My reading of the work of Polymeris Voglis was similar.¹⁵ In his book on political prisoners during the Greek Civil War, he argues that prisoners as subjects are in the process of becoming subjects, and that they are constituted by relations and processes; one of these is the experience of torture. Voglis shows that the various degrees of torture (physical and psychological) can find forms in subjectivity (for instance the techniques, developed collectively, of how to react to torture), while, at its extreme, torture is meant precisely to disintegrate subjectivity. In referring to "suffering as subjectivity", I do not mean an identity through pain, but ways of elaborating sorrow and of suffering, when it is possible for oneself, and of course for others – such as in the cases of Rammohun Roy and Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, quoted by Chakrabarty. Amitav Ghosh, the great Indian writer, has spoken about the culture of suffering of people in southeast Asia: they do not claim to be victims at all, and follow rites which insert them actively into traditions connecting generations as well as the present grieving ones – and Ghosh gives a moving description of a candle rite after the Tsunami.¹⁶

Coming to Gilroy, it is the emotional mixture of horror, pietas and shame felt by the painter J. M. W. Turner, and then by hundreds of spectators, in front of his 1840 painting of a slave ship throwing its dead and dying overboard as a storm approaches, that represents a point of departure for Gilroy's effort to understand the actions and feelings of his protagonists who experienced the crisscrossing of the Atlantic, those African-Americans who found in European heritage one of the spurs for their struggles. They invested emotionally in striving to be both European and black, therefore not merely nourishing an Africentrist or African-American identification. Thus they created a type of double or multiple identity and appreciation of the other which many of

us wish will become a common feeling in Europe in the near future, a Europe which is still too much a fortress in a cultural and social sense. Gilroy's attention to emotions has contributed powerfully to recognising the "playful diasporic intimacy that has been a marked feature of transnational black Atlantic creativity".¹⁷

Leela Gandhi has articulated a similar theme even more explicitly in her historical concept of "affective communities" applied to ties established between individuals and groups that in the period from 1878 to 1914 renounced the privileges of imperialism and elected affinity with victims of their own expansionist cultures. She studies South Asian and European friendships in a global context, tracing the networks connecting figures like Edward Carpenter, the English socialist and homosexual reformer, and the young vegetarian barrister Mohandas Gandhi; or the Jewish French mystic Mirra Alfassa and the Indian yogi scholar Sri Aurobindo. Thus Leela Gandhi challenges "imperial binarism" and its "aggressive manichaeism", as well as any homogeneous portrayal of the "West" and its role in relation to anti-colonial struggles, on the basis of internal and subjugated forms of anti-imperialism and of affectional possibilities. Her subtitle, which includes the phrase *the Politics of Friendship*, draws on Jacques Derrida's *Politiques de l'amitié* and his concept of hospitality, which extends the idea of unconditional responsibility for others to that of receiving uninvited guests without imposing any preconditions, while conditional forms of hospitality require that, in order to be received, a foreigner must first disclose his/her identity. Derrida maintains that one can become xenophobic in order to protect one's own home, which is actually what makes it possible to be hospitable. Leela Gandhi insists on the idea of philoxenia, a term derived from the fragments of Epicurus and his followers, in which friendship is construed as fidelity or love for guests, strangers and strange friends, predicated in distaste for the racial exclusivity of the polis. She finds philoxenic actions in dissidents protesting against their own governments on behalf of vulnerable strangers, for instance in recent demonstrations of US dissidents against their government's neo-imperialism, or in any "unexpected 'gesture' of friendship towards all those on the other side of the fence".¹⁸

In following this intriguing concept of philoxenia, I found an elaboration by two Greek scholars in Australia, Toulia Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos, in which they have proposed a Greek-Australian concept of philoxenia, i.e., a conception of "unconditional hospitality", as an ethical guide to receiving Australia's onshore asylum seekers, the so-called boat people. These authors define the proper site of hospitality as a discursive space, an intersubjectively generated sharing in the feeling of homeness that informs the subjects. Philoxenia demands that the questioning of a stranger's identity and the purpose of his/her visit arise only after a stranger has been fully welcomed, and all his/her immediate needs met – food, rest and familiarisation with the place. The authors refer to some scenes from Homer's *Odyssey*, such as the visit that Athena and Telemachus pay to Nestor in order to learn about Telemachus' father, Odysseus. Nestor welcomes them without asking anything; he simply invites them to drink and say a prayer to Poseidon.¹⁹ Now, it seems to me that this could also be a way of testing whether the guests belong to the same culture as the host, but let us leave this point aside for the sake of the major argument. In any case, the lesson that Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos draw from the examples is that *philoxenia* can extend to every living being, human and divine, and of course animal. It is a feeling of love for the being of the *xenoi*. The authors are aware of the limits of application of

their principle, which cannot be guaranteed through political institutional means. As an ethical stance, it intends to counteract the dehumanisation of uninvited strangers, which we witness in our Mediterranean countries every day.

I have focused mainly on love, because my own research has been in this field, but this does not mean that the importance of the study of other connecting emotions is to be underestimated, because of course connections can be established for instance on fear and by fear, by feelings of loss, by anger and hatred, that can unite both face-to-face and distant communities. Judith Butler has noticed that the feeling of loss contributes greatly to the international gay and lesbian community constituting itself politically, adding that “we are constituted as fields of desire and physical vulnerability”.²⁰ Thus, the study of xenophobia could be a useful counterpart to the study of philoxenia.

I would like to conclude by mentioning the question of limits. We can no longer share the type of Eurocentric and male centred Europeanism that existed in the past; we must find new forms of Europeaness that allow for the full respect of differences. This means we cannot avoid going through a critique of Europe’s cultural legacy, within which the attitude to love is a central element, recognising not only the limits of a Eurocentric self-representation of the loving subject but also the very limits of Europeaness, thus avoiding the danger of proposing a new type of expansionism in suggesting a multiple European identity. Not everybody wishes to become European. While it is important to break away from Eurocentricism in order to fully accept the new Europeans and to establish relationships with other peoples and cultures – relationships that can contain respect and attraction – it is also essential to recognise the limits not only of Europeaness but of love itself in its historical forms. I have in mind the letters written by Jews imprisoned in concentration camps in France, such as Drancy, between 1941 and 1944, Jews who were often deported to and killed in Auschwitz. Many of these letters, some exchanged between married or engaged couples, are full of love – but they do not succeed in expressing it, except in their obsessive requests to alleviate their physical misery with relatives’ despatches and in their pitiful reassurances to them that as prisoners they are surviving well. A few salutations such as “adorée”, “mon tout” and “mon amour” punctuate the letters, paltry scraps of loving words suffocated by the atrocity of events. Even love can succumb to extreme violence. But sometimes it is able to project a message of union – not of fusion – beyond the violence that allows people to endure current oppression and look forward to future realities.

NOTES

- 1 Stuart Hall, *Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies*, in L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, P. A. Treichler (eds), *Cultural Studies*, New York/London: Routledge, 1992, pp. 277–286.
- 2 Luisa Passerini, *Love and the Idea of Europe*, Oxford/New York: Berghahn, 2008 (forthcoming).
- 3 Giuseppe Martini, *Ermeneutica e narrazione. Un percorso tra psichiatria e psicoanalisi*, Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1990.

- 4 Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, New York/London: Routledge, 2004, p. 42.
- 5 Annemarie Fortier, *Migrant Belongings. Memory, Space, Identity*, Oxford/New York: Berg, 2000.
- 6 Rosi Braidotti, *Transpositions. On Nomadic Ethics*, Cambridge/Malden, MA: Polity, 2006.
- 7 Giacomo Rizzolatti and Corrado Sinigaglia, *So quel che fai. Il cervello che agisce e i neuroni specchio*, Milan: Raffaello Cortina, 2006.
- 8 Luisa Passerini, *Europe in Love, Love in Europe. Imagination and Politics between the Wars*, London: Tauris, 1999.
- 9 Luisa Passerini, Liliana Ellena and Alexander Geppert (eds), *Europe and Love: New Dangerous Liaisons*, Oxford/New York: Berghahn, forthcoming.
- 10 Passerini, *Love and the Idea of Europe*.
- 11 Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, New York: Columbia UP, 1988; Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy", in Craig J. Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991, pp. 109–142. I will not discuss here the complex issue of whether Habermas reformulated his theory in such a way as to actually respond to Fraser's criticism.
- 12 Lauren Berlant (ed.), *Intimacy*, Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2000; Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings. Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, Durham: Duke UP, 2003; Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, New York: Zone Books, 2002.
- 13 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization (= Public Worlds 1)*, Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- 14 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton/Oxford: Princeton UP, 2000, pp. 123–4.
- 15 Polymeris Voglis, *Becoming a Subject. Political Prisoners during the Greek Civil War*, New York/London: Berghahn, 2002.
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- 17 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, London/New York: Verso, 1993, p. 16.
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