

Sensitive Objects

Affect and Material Culture

Edited by

Jonas Frykman &
Maja Povrzanović Frykman

Nordic
Academic
Press

NORDIC ACADEMIC PRESS
CHECKPOINT

Contents

Preface	7
1. Affect and Material Culture	9
Perspectives and Strategies <i>Jonas Frykman & Maja Povrzanović Frykman</i>	
2. Moods and Emotions	31
Some Philosophical Reflections on the 'Affective Turn' <i>Nils Gilje</i>	
3. Ethnography and the Choices Posed by the 'Affective Turn'	55
<i>Stef Jansen</i>	
4. Sensitive Objects of Humanitarian Aid	79
Corporeal Memories and Affective Continuities <i>Maja Povrzanović Frykman</i>	
5. The Tитоaffect	107
Tracing Objects and Memories of Socialism in Postsocialist Croatia <i>Nevena Škrbić Alempijević & Sanja Potkonjak</i>	
6. Emotional Baggage	125
Unpacking the Suitcase <i>Orvar Löfgren</i>	
7. Done by Inheritance	153
A Phenomenological Approach to Affect and Material Culture <i>Jonas Frykman</i>	
8. What Alters When the Traditional Sámi Costume Travels?	179
A Study of Affective Investments in the Sápmi <i>Britt Kramvig & Anne Britt Flemmen</i>	

9. In the Mood	199
Place and Tools in the Music Industry with a Focus on Entrepreneurship <i>Elisabet Sørjorddal Hauge</i>	
10. Innovation and Embodiment in a Small Town Hotel	215
<i>Kirsti Mathiesen Hjemdahl & Jonas Frykman</i>	
11. The Performative Museum	237
Designing a Total Experience <i>Sarah Holst Kjær</i>	
12. Companion Pieces Written Through a Drift	257
<i>Lesley Stern & Kathleen Stewart</i>	
Contributors	275
Index	279

Preface

This book is based on the papers presented at the conference entitled *Sensitive Objects*, held at the Inter-University Centre in Dubrovnik, Croatia, 23–25 April 2014. The conference was initiated by Jonas Frykman and Maja Povrzanović Frykman, who co-organised it with Kirsti Mathiesen Hjemdahl and Nevena Škrbić Alempijević. We thank Agderforskning, Kristiansand, Norway, for both hosting the conference and supporting the production of this book within the KULNÆR project.

The editors and three of the contributors are affiliated to Agderforskning. Given that studies of innovation in the tourism, cultural, and creative industries are the hallmark of that institute, we hope that theoretical incentives concerning affect and emotion will also prove useful in the wider field of innovation research. At the same time, we want to point to the value of applied research projects, such as those presented in this book, as constructive contributions to the theoretical advancement of affect studies.

Jonas Frykman & Maja Povrzanović Frykman

Affect and Material Culture

Perspectives and Strategies

Jonas Frykman & Maja Povrzanović Frykman

Becoming attuned

At that wonderful concert you attended, did the music fill your body, did your feet dance uncontrollably and did your voice crackle in the sing-along with people you had never met before? Do you remember the sweet pain in your palms after applauding and the almost suffocating throng of bodies? Was the atmosphere uplifting? Did it encapsulate sounds, sights, smells, bodily sensations, and feelings simultaneously? What about the sudden feeling of power and togetherness when you took part in a demonstration, the sudden shouting and rush of blood to the head when your home team scored a goal?

By posing questions like this about the body, senses, feelings and atmosphere, we hope to attune readers to affect – the subject to which this book is devoted. We will look at how affects matter in general and, in particular, how they are related to the body, the environment, and things. This, we believe, is the contribution to which ethnology and anthropology are best suited, considering the changing yet persistent importance of material culture in these disciplines and of fieldwork for understanding the affective potentialities of objects.¹

Interdisciplinary studies of affect and emotion have produced ‘a virtual explosion’ of research and theoretical writings in the last decades, writes the psychologist Lisa Feldman Barrett (2010: 203), who heads an interdisciplinary affective science laboratory. These studies are not only marked by differing and sometimes conflicting theoretical perspectives

and research strategies – ‘old debates continue to rage on’ (ibid.), especially when body and language are concerned – but also lack a common scientific language that would enable ‘an epistemologically objective scientific enterprise about something that is so ontologically subjective’ (ibid.) and eludes ‘conventional semiotic and semantic procedure’ (Gibson 2013: 243).² As always in academia, this dilemma is characteristic of perspectives that are in the process of breaking new ground. The fact that the words *affect*, *emotion*, *feeling* and *sentiment* are often used interchangeably makes dialogue across disciplinary borders difficult and confusing. Being a truly interdisciplinary field, genealogical influences are still clearly visible (Pellegrini and Puar 2009). Although definitions vary, the common keywords when describing affects seem to be intensity, contingency and potentiality.

A commoner way of approaching what affects stand for is found in the writings of geographer Ben Anderson, who reflects on ‘affective atmospheres’ and uses the vague term ‘something’ in many of his texts. To him, affective atmospheres express ‘an ill-defined indefinite something, that exceeds rational explanation and clear figuration. Something that hesitates at the edge of the unsayable’ (Anderson 2009: 78). Being ‘at the edge’ implies that they ‘mix together narrative and signifying elements and non-narrative and asignifying elements’ (ibid. 80). In line with our introductory questions about the atmosphere at a concert, Anderson (ibid. 77) reflects more on what such atmospheres *do* and less on what they *are*. Affective atmospheres ‘may interrupt, perturb and haunt fixed persons, places or things’ (ibid. 78). They are indeterminate with regard to the distinction between the subjective and objective and are ‘impersonal in that they belong to collective situations and yet can be felt as intensely personal’ (ibid. 80).

We claim that ethnographic research provides a fertile ground from which to capture the ambiguities of affective and emotive experience. For an ethnographer, that ‘ill-defined indefinite something’ is always related to particular people, places, situations and objects. Lingering momentarily with the examples of music and atmosphere, when Elisabet Hauge (Chapter 9) writes about the background of a successful Norwegian black metal band and its lead guitarist, she portrays a man whose music draws inspiration from his immediate material environment – a ‘very sensuous interface of people, places and things’ (Bille et al. 2015: 37). The old building housing ‘The Mill’ studio in his home village, its waterfall, the

surrounding forest and the carefully scythed fields are all objects that put him ‘in the mood’, make him feel that there is ‘something in the air’ and inspire his compositions and performances. This ‘mood’ and this ‘something’ are not only physically experienced by him, but also by the other musicians, producers, record managers, volunteers and audiences, and contributes to an affective attunement to the world of metal music.

The effect of an atmosphere, as suggested above, is deeply personal and embodied, yet is hard to describe. When listening to music, we can *feel* the goose pimples on our skin and let our fingers snap to the rhythm. Music does not have to engage the mind’s cognitive functions, but has the power to move our bodies and make us dance, jump and turn. A concert becomes ‘a surface resonant with the rhythms of music, as well as of bodies, crowds, calendar events, trucks, heart rates, muscle contractions and more’ (Clough 2010: 228, citing Henriques 2010). Music may fill us with joy or sadness. Regardless of which, it is almost always a mix of bodily motion, affect and emotion. The moment we engage in the scholarly practice of analysing such experiences and try to understand their history, symbolic significance and what they represent, their complexities are too easily reduced and the beat of the music – that ‘something in the air’ that *affects* us but is so hard to put into words – too easily lost.

Changing perspectives on affect

Nils Gilje (Chapter 2) states that, by definition, affect deals with the pre-theoretical conception of the world. He sees the present interest in the field as linked to how a cognitive bias has left whole territories of human life uncharted, where moods and emotions are largely omitted from an understanding of the human condition. But this turn to affect is not new, as the two professors of gender studies, Ann Pellegrini and Jasbir Puar, indicate:

What some have hailed as a recent ‘affective turn’ in fact draws across older formations of sentiment studies; theories of emotion; ‘structures of feeling’ (to invoke Raymond Williams’s oft-cited formulation); the work of Gottfried Leibniz, Baruch Spinoza, Henri Bergson, and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, among others; and science and technology studies. Thus, what appears to be a

‘new’ critical, conceptual lens that has gained significant intellectual and scholarly cachet in the last decade is in fact indebted to multiple, and often contradictory, genealogical threads. (Pellegri and Puar 2009: 36)

When Gilje traces the fate of affects and emotions back through the history of Western philosophy he ends up with Spinoza, who, unlike Descartes, could not accept that human consciousness was independent of the body and free from the intensity of affects. But Gilje does something more than trace these intellectual forefathers. By going back to the fifteenth century philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and forwards to Søren Kierkegaard and the phenomenologists of the twentieth century, he hints at the occurrence and recurrence of the same theme at times of major social change and development. The most elaborate philosophical discussions of mood, attunement and affect are to be found at turning points like the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution, Romanticism and the decisive years around the first World War.

The novelty of this particular ‘turn’ is that it follows a general questioning of theory in the humanities and social sciences, and especially in cultural studies and critical theory. For instance, the focus on texts becomes less prominent than the emphasis on readers’ affective responses. In their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (2010) list no fewer than eight main approaches to affect, among which the phenomenological and postphenomenological approaches are the most influential. What they see as a clear humanities-related approach is a diverse attempt to ‘turn away from the linguistic turn and its attendant social constructionisms’ (ibid. 7). They note that the research within this approach focuses on ‘those ethico-aesthetic spaces that are opened up (or shut down) by a widely disparate assortment of affective encounters’ (ibid. 8).

Deriving from the Latin *afficere*, the word affect implies passivity, in that it means ‘to have had something done to one’. The general agreement is that affect encompasses the various capacities of bodies to affect and be affected, and that it therefore refers to forces and intensities that are visceral (see Cichosz 2014: 56). Hence, the interest in affect in the first place involves a focus on bodies and embodiment, on ‘the very fabric of the body and those forms of embodied experience that often remain unseen, unnoticed and unrecognised’ (Åhäll and Gregory 2015b: 5).³ By

introducing ‘an empiricism of sensation’ (Clough 2010: 224) into the social sciences and the humanities, affect studies ‘intensified the difference or difference of subjectivity and the human body while turning attention to the sociality of the transmission of force or intensity across bodies, and not only human bodies’ (ibid.), thereby including non-humans in the study of affects.⁴

Seigworth and Gregg (2010: 8) see the effort to understand the working of affect as ‘how the “outside” realms of the pre-/extra-/para-linguistic intersect with the “lower” or proximal senses (such as touch, taste, smell, rhythm and motion-sense, or, alternately/ultimately, the autonomic nervous system)’. Philosophical inquiries into bioscience suggest that affect is ‘both a “precognitive” attribute (not in terms of a telos, but in terms of a quality) of the body as well as emotion’s trace effect’ (Pellegrini and Puar 2009: 37). Such a conception of affect implies a distinction between sensation and the perception of that sensation: ‘Affect, from this perspective, is precisely what allows the body to be an open system, always in concert with its virtuality, the potential of becoming’ (ibid.). Affect may therefore ‘anchor claims about the materiality of bodies and physiological processes that are not contained or representable by language or cognition alone’ (ibid.).

However, the idea that affect can be analysed as a ‘precognitive’ phenomenon has been criticised by scholars such as Margaret Wetherell, a professor of social psychology who finds the idea that our bodies are shaped by an outer force prior to sensemaking unsustainable: ‘we cannot create a split between a semi-conscious, automaton-like, reactive body and the reflexive, discursive, interpreting, meaning-making, communicating social actor’ (Wetherell 2015a: 160). In line with recent neuroscience and psychobiology research, Wetherell advocates an analysis that ‘does not presume a strongly, pre-organized, built-in set of innate affect programs’ (ibid.). She sees affective practice as ‘a moment of recruitment, articulation or enlistment when many complicated flows across bodies, subjectivities, relations, histories and contexts entangle and intertwine together to form just this affective moment, episode or atmosphere with its particular possible classifications’ (ibid.).

The affect studies pioneer, Brian Massumi, claims that affects works synesthetically, which ‘implies a participation of the senses in each other’ (1995: 96). The simultaneous activation of senses such as taste, smell and touch has often been mentioned by scholars of affect (see e.g.

Highmore 2010). This ‘dismisses any hierarchical separation between soma and matter’ (Boscagli 2014: 4). For instance, when Povrzanović Frykman (Chapter 4) writes about how memories of humanitarian aid are triggered by specific objects, it is clear that people’s physical reactions are activated by the sensations of taste, smell, sound and touch. The synesthetic quality of affects can also be used to set the stage for a total experience, something that is of particular importance to Hauge’s analysis (Chapter 9) of the concerts at ‘The Mill’. Here, the black metal concerts are intertwined with a material surrounding that includes good food, the aroma of newly mown meadows, and torchlight illuminating the darkness of night.

Affect and emotion

Affect and emotion are often paired up in the literature. However, invoking one or the other ‘has come to signal a basic orientation to the self, world and their interrelation (as well as in some cases a particular politics and ethics)’ (Anderson 2009: 80). Scholars who agree that affects *precede* conscious knowing place it *beyond* emotions depending on how culturally defined the emotions seem to be. Massumi (1995: 86) defines affect as ‘a state of suspense, potentially of disruption’, expressed through an array of physiological reactions (muscular contraction, secretions) and visible symptoms (voice changes, facial expressions). Emotion, on the other hand, is ‘the socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal’ (ibid. 88).

In Nigel Thrift’s words, affects refer to ‘complex, self-referential states of being’, whereas emotions are ‘cultural interpretations’ of affects, culturally constructed ‘everyday understandings of affects’ that have a distinctive vocabulary and serve as a means of relating to others (Thrift 2008: 221). As summarised by Anderson (2009: 80),

the distinction between affect and emotion has been caught up in the subjective/objective problematic via two oppositions: narrative/non-narrative and semiotic/asignifying. The terms have fallen on one or the other of those divides – affect with non-narrative and asignifying and emotion with narrative and semiotic. Affect with the impersonal and objective. Emotion with the personal and subjective.

While ‘the emotions of anger, regret, jealousy or empathy, are best communicated by describing the personal circumstances and sociocultural context of their staging’ (Henriques 2010: 82; see also Bendix 2015), affects have ‘the kind of significance that has to be embodied, felt and experienced’ (ibid.). Affects are often equated with ‘intensities’ (Massumi 1995; Stewart 2007). Emotion, then, is ‘qualified intensity’, ‘intensity owned and recognized’ (Massumi (1995: 88). For Massumi, a linguistic expression that ‘qualifies’ is not simply in opposition to intensity: ‘The relationship between the levels of intensity and qualification is not one of conformity or correspondence, but of resonance or interference, amplification or dampening’ (ibid.). However, ‘matter-of-factness dampens intensity’ (ibid. 86).

This ‘dampening of intensity’ raises significant questions about the methodology of studying affect in the frames of ethnographic research. What happens when affects are ‘translated’ as representations? What happens to affect in the process of narration? In psychology, theorising about affects is based on controlled observations of physical reactions, often in experimental situations where expressions, movements and utterances can be registered in a systematic way. But in several chapters of this book we are faced with interviews, memories and recollections of significant events that are narratively framed, and thus by definition stand out as emotions or a mix of affect and emotion. It is therefore of crucial importance to explore how the cognitively defined emotions that are encountered in interviews can be used to investigate affective states. In Povrzanović Frykman’s contribution (Chapter 4) we see this dilemma drawn to its extreme. Corporeal memories of war are narrated two decades after the events took place. As a researcher she was not even present at most of the interviews. So how can she possibly grasp the multilayered affective reactions that took place in the interview situations? We have to qualify the background given so far by discussing some of the basic features of contemporary approaches to analysing affect.

The problem of naming

The power that resides in the affect perspective is to be found in what it promises to open up. Kathleen Stewart (2007) consistently refers to ‘forces’ and ‘intensities’ as a vague ‘something’. If nothing is defined, there is a strong potential for something new and unexpected to take place: ‘Once captured in the content nets of specific emotions, affects lose

their capacity for movement and change' (Cichosz 2014: 56). Massumi also claims that any definition 'annuls the potential' and 'turns formless affective expression into content, such as a discernible emotion' (ibid.). The moment we name/define affect we choose how to deal with it and probably engage in a culturally appropriate emotional reaction.

However – and this is comforting for those working with interviews – even if affect is not entirely 'containable in knowledge', Massumi sees it as 'analyzable in effect, as effect' (ibid. 107, n. 2). His explanation of how affective and emotional layers are connected captures how (e.g. in Chapter 4) an interviewee slows down, starts to breathe heavily, sighs and pauses as the narration touches on more demanding topics.

Researchers such as Sara Ahmed take a different stance by focusing on what affects *do* rather than what they *are*. She explores 'how naming emotions involves different orientations towards the objects they construct' (Ahmed 2004: 14) and takes clearly circumscribed emotions as the starting point when analysing affects. She notes how affect can accumulate around a sign or figure and argues that the circulation of affect occurs through specific cultural processes (see Wetherell 2015a for a critical discussion of Ahmed's work). An example of how to use such an approach can be found in this volume, in the analysis of the multifaceted (post)colonial relations between the state and the Sámi population. Kramvig and Flemmen (Chapter 8) also describe how discriminatory names and frequently used blanket terms form the basis for a wide array of unspoken, affective attitudes that are difficult to get rid of.

Again the focus on practice – what affect *does* – also tends to widen the scope for what it *is*. When, for instance, bodily memories of war are brought to the surface (Chapter 4), when traumatic conflicts are played out in families (Chapter 7), or in the humiliation of having your cultural heritage faked and appropriated for commercial purposes (Chapter 8), affects do not appear as significantly 'dampened' by being narrated or framed in wider socio-historical understandings of the issues in question. By *juxtaposing* corporeal and cognitive processes in fieldwork or interview situations, much of the potential for understanding affect seems to get lost.

This is fully in accord with Wetherell's critique (2013) of how affect is too quickly contrasted with the discursive and the cognitive and distinguished from 'domesticated' emotion. She claims that the 'splitting of affect from everyday talk, discourse and meaning-making and the presentation of affect as something pre-conscious, to do with just bodies

and events, makes little social psychological sense' (ibid. 349). She further argues that 'the objective of affect research is to produce textured, lively analyses of multiple modes of engagement' (ibid.), for which purpose the studies of discursive practice are more apt than 'non-representational' methodological approaches (see also Wetherell 2015b).⁵

Approaching affects ethnographically

This collection of essays does not try to turn the tables on language, narrations, or any other representations or trends within cognitive studies.⁶ Instead, it is born out of a curiosity about how more established ways of analysing culture could benefit from advances in the growing field of affect and emotion studies. For more than a century anthropologists and ethnologists have investigated everyday life, where affects and emotions have always played an important role, but have until recently 'not often been explicitly articulated as a force in themselves in theories of culture, history, and ways of life' (Stewart and Lewis 2015: 236).⁷

Most of the contributors to this volume are ethnologists and anthropologists with an extensive experience of fieldwork and a pronounced sensitivity for the material objects embedded in their respective (historicised) contexts. Nils Gilje, who is a philosopher, Elisabet Hauge, a cultural geographer, and Lesley Stern, a professor of visual arts are the only contributors from other disciplines. Presented in more detail below, some contribute brand new ethnographic material and engage in autobiographical writing, whereas others revisit material gathered in earlier ethnographic studies or reach for examples from popular culture. The contributors invite us to their fieldwork sites in Norway, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the US, yet these sites serve only as a background for their examination of how objects embody or trigger affects and produce affective atmospheres. The book starts with theoretical and methodological discussions (chapters 1–3), and moves on to specific analyses of when, how, for whom, and why particular objects become sensitive (chapters 4–8). The final chapters (9–11) place the discussion of this sensitivity in the wider frame of their authors' professional interest in innovation and culture tourism, while the last chapter (12) lends the book a finishing twist towards experimental writing.

As discussed above, the influence of philosophy on research into affects can hardly be overstated. Consequently, many contemporary

studies pursue elaborate theoretical discussions rather than analysing ethnographic material. When Nils Gilje (Chapter 2) traces studies of affect to their historical settings, he is trying to close the gap between philosophy, ethnology and anthropology: ‘Philosophy has always been good at asking questions but cultural and behavioural sciences are then called upon to come up with interesting answers’ (Frykman & Gilje 2003: 8). This book sets out to overcome this divide and put theoretical concepts and approaches into use.

Stef Jansen (Chapter 3) critically examines the advantages and disadvantages of adopting contemporary theories of affect and the possibilities of integrating the perspectives they offer with established procedures of ethnographic work. As a point of departure he refers to his research in present-day Sarajevo (Jansen 2015), but also to a film evocative of the affective atmospheres in Bosnia and Herzegovina after the 1990s war. Why are ‘intensities’ experienced unequally, what does it take to ‘get’ the affective state of the other, and how should we write about it?

Maja Povrzanović Frykman (Chapter 4) discusses the range of methodological issues that can arise in interviews, with a particular focus on objects and their ‘sensitivity’. How can describing a tin of hardly edible minced meat received as part of a humanitarian aid parcel in wartime Sarajevo, or the cherished memory of sharing a carefully tended tomato grown on the windowsill, release bodily reactions and emotional outbursts some twenty years later?

Nevena Škrbić Alempijević and Sanja Potkonjak (Chapter 5) write about a birthday party in postsocialist Zagreb that was ruined when an object from the past – a huge dusty portrait of former Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito – unexpectedly turned up as a gift. In the twinkling of an eye the atmosphere at the party became suffocatingly thick. What can this example, entangled as it is with objects that have changed their meaning but retained their impact, tell us about the affective charge of history, politics and place?

Orvar Löfgren (Chapter 6) asks how things harbour hopes and dreams, traumatic memories and a hard-to-verbalise sense of abandon and adventure when they are thrown together in a suitcase. The packing of ordinary luggage means both preparing for a journey and assembling objects that might appear ‘sensitive’ inasmuch as they trigger affects. By employing a historical perspective, Löfgren also demonstrates the malleability and formation of emotions due to the learning processes facilitated by films.

The undoing of a home and its objects is discussed by Jonas Frykman (Chapter 7), who analyses situations relating to the division of an inheritance – a ‘material, affective and multisensory environment, interpreted, known and acted in by domestic practitioners, through various sensory embodied ways of knowing’ (Pink et al., 2014: 428). When parents die, some things attain a pronounced affective value and at the same time serve as symbols, as the focus of narrations and as starting points for a return to past worlds, like Proust’s famous madeleine. Emotions run high and siblings, once close, become enemies who might never see or talk to one another again.

Britt Kramvig and Anne Britt Flemmen (Chapter 8) use the theories of affect to explain what happened when a traditional Sámi costume was mocked by the display of Chinese-manufactured copies at a Norwegian food-chain kick-off. Some of the Sámi community engaged in a fierce debate in which strong feelings, stemming from centuries of discrimination, were revived.

The essay by Elisabet Hauge (Chapter 9) about innovation and affect in the black metal musical world has been introduced above. This is the first of three essays based on the study of culture as a motor for innovation and regional development, which has become the hallmark of Agderforskning institute.

Locating their research in a small Norwegian coastal town, Kirsti Hjemdahl Mathiesen and Jonas Frykman (Chapter 10) discuss how a female entrepreneur runs a successful hotel more or less on intuition. The proprietor has developed a hard to formalise or calculate ‘sense’ for what present and future customers want, how to choose between different cultural activities and, moreover, how to communicate this to the staff. Considering the overall materiality of the hotel and its environment, and the mobile phone as part of the proprietor’s subjectivity, the researchers explain the success of the hotel with the aid of affect theory.

Can applied research contribute to theoretical advances in the field of affect studies? Sarah Holst Kjær (Chapter 11) pursues this question by describing how Chinese and European visitors reacted to the storm-swept lighthouse museum of Lindesnes in southernmost Norway. The place spurred reactions that were poles apart. For example, the European tourists felt exhilarated at being exposed to the elements, and the wind and waves enhanced their feeling of uniqueness, whereas the Chinese tourists shivered in the biting winds and longed for protected barbecue

sites. The same milieu was experienced in accordance with how the senses, affects and emotions are culturally organised. This poses further questions about how we should study the interrelations between body, culture and place and how perspectives on affect can best be used to refine such analyses.

The book concludes with an essay by Kathleen Stewart and Lesley Stern (Chapter 12). They take us on a journey in which affective relations to places and objects are central. At the same time, it becomes an excursion into the art of writing ethnography as recomposing brief moments of affective encounters and testing the limits set by academic traditions and scholarly expectations – something that is also discussed by Stef Jansen (Chapter 3). Their writing responds to the philosopher and psychologist Ruth Leys (2011), one of the most experienced researchers of affect, who encourages its scholars to get out of their armchairs in order to ‘provide thick descriptions of life experiences of the kind that are familiar to anthropologists and novelists but are widely held to be inimical to science’ (ibid. 471). This resonates perfectly with the art of haiku writers, who

attend to a moving configuration of perceptions – a glimpse of colour, let’s say, plus a special tincture or texture combined with a peculiar sound pressing through a moment – that can resonate in the reader sensibility so that ... ‘the mind is struck as with a hammer, bringing the senses up short and releasing a flood of associations’. (Gibson 2013: 246)

Affects and objects

With some significant exceptions, such as Navaro-Yashin (2009, 2012), Gibson (2013), Jansen (2013, 2015), and Bille et al. 2015), few ethnographers have worked on affects in relation to material culture.⁸ As ethnologists and anthropologists we are interested in practices and lived experiences that are always historically embedded. We therefore do not understand objects as having an *independent* affective ‘charge’. It is the practices of the people using the objects or who are inspired by environments that we observe, and it is the people we ask who tell us how they understand their practices ‘as goal-oriented, meaningful and affectively loaded’ (Jansen 2013: 35).

Kramig and Flemmen (Chapter 8) align with the anthropologist Yael Navaro-Yashin (2009, 2012), who has done a lot of systematic fieldwork on affects. In her work on Turkish Cypriots inhabiting expropriated Greek dwellings, Navaro-Yashin challenges the way in which affect has been theorised, using metaphors that invoke abstraction, imaginaries of immateriality and conceptualisations of invisibility (ibid. 203). She also claims that affect is contained and emitted through the solidity, presence, visibility and tangibility of objects – a view of material culture that has been discussed at length by Hannah Arendt in the *Human Condition* (1958).

Arendt's approach sums up most of the contributors' perspectives on material culture as well as the inspiration they draw from phenomenology. Here, inspiration is taken from Martin Heidegger, from phenomenology in general, and from postphenomenology in particular (see Ihde 1990; Ahmed 2004; Frykman and Gilje 2003; Frykman 2012) in order to pull philosophy – transformed into 'a more contemporary, flexible and effective philosophical toolcase' – down from the commanding heights to 'the trenches' (Ihde 2003: 4).

Heidegger's unique contribution is not so much his well-known statement that it is impossible to perceive the world cognitively without being tuned into or in a certain mood, but his combination of mood *and* material culture. Who else ventured to connect affects to something as mundane as tools and practical work? At times Heidegger has been caricatured for thinking from the perspective of a workshop or farmer engaged in different routines of tool use, although that perhaps says more about academic snobbery than his philosophical aptitude. From such a standpoint, tools such as hammers, scythes, axes, saws and knives could be seen as part of the countryman's 'equipment' to be used for the purposes that their owner intended at a particular moment. With his scythe in his hands, the farmer perhaps envisaged fields to be mown, barns to be filled, flour to be milled and bread on the table. These things were *zuhanden*, or 'ready-to-hand', that affected his body as well as his intentions. His thoughts were given direction without the objects per se being the centre of his attention. On the other hand, the moment the scythe broke, the farmer had to reflect on its construction: whether it was really meant to be used on such stony fields and whether a better brand was available. The tool itself became *vorhanden*, 'present-at-hand', an object to be named, mulled over, something that found its cultural

significance in the inventory of other objects. As such, it presented itself to him as a symbol or a representation.

To Heidegger, the material as well as the social environment – *Umwelt* – was essential for understanding what ‘being there’ – *Dasein* – is all about. By using the notion of *Befindlichkeit*, he simultaneously referred to people’s moods and situations. The German phrase *sich befinden* means being situated in the sense of meeting the situation in a mood that makes its potential matter. Heidegger used the word mood – *Stimmung* – to denote this affective attitude to the world. Moods make it clear how things present themselves, how they are given substance and are selected from an otherwise neutral or indifferent environment. Any environment is thus perceived as *sensitised* prior to being intentionally explored. In his chapter on inheritance conflicts, Frykman (Chapter 7) describes an upset woman who in her *Stimmung* of anger is about to smash a crystal vase into smithereens on the pavement – a situation that leaves us in no doubt about affects being related to objects. This is the kind of moment that aptly captures what Heidegger meant by *Befindlichkeit*: a situation where affects make things matter, a complex chain of relations that is instantly felt and made tangible.

As the ways of approaching affects in this book are predominantly ethnographic, they tend to focus on what Bourdieu (1977) called *situated praxis*. Several contributors begin their analyses from similar points of departure – an event, a situation, or a scene. This is the case with the appearance of a fake *gákti* in a Sámi area (Chapter 8), eagerly received humanitarian aid in a besieged town (Chapter 4), the sudden display of a contested politicised portrait at a birthday party (Chapter 5) and tourists turning up at a lighthouse (Chapter 11). Similar to zooming in on the moments of despair, grief and quarrelling when parents die and objects from their estate are to be distributed (Chapter 7), they all in their different ways attempt to ‘catch’ the affects associated with objects at the moment of perception. Such moments reveal what people experience and know but perhaps cannot clearly articulate – the contingencies and junctures, the ‘tentative, charged, overwhelming, and alive’, to echo Kathleen Stewart (2007: 128–129).

As Hjemdahl and Frykman (Chapter 10) show, when the researchers visited Hotel Norge and its dynamic manager they literally ran with her from room to room and from one panorama view to another. Interviewing her about her activities and plans for the future was a bodily enterprise.

Talking was not enough, they had to move together through the hotel environment, look out of the windows, feel the wallpaper, see the size of the ballroom and so on. Similarly, as Hauge (Chapter 9) documents in her study of how place is important to musical entrepreneurs, a place is not simply a location, but a site where people live out their lives and where objects serve as useful tools.

There is a striking similarity between how Massumi juxtaposes affects as non-cognitive, irreducibly bodily and non-signifying and emotions as cognitive, vocal, laden with meaning and culturally embedded and how Heidegger describes relations to objects. According to Heidegger, the affective relation to material culture is *zuhanden*, which means bodily and non-signifying, while the emotional dimension has many traits in common with *vorhanden*, which is cognitive, symbolic and culturally embedded.

However, Orvar Löfgren's study of suitcases and baggage (Chapter 6) shows the danger of dichotomisation. Things are constantly on the move between *zuhanden* and *vorhanden*, necessity and symbol, 'intensity' and 'qualification'. A suitcase contains the things that are essential for your travel and at the same time is an outer shell filled with prestige, social significance, dreams, aspirations and commercial value. Löfgren uses Doreen Massey's concept of *thrown togetherness* to denote how haphazard the packing can sometimes be and how the contents gain affinity by virtue of them being in the same bag. He also hints at another important dimension in Heidegger's theory of how objects are attached to one another, namely the concept of *worlding*. The notion of worlding nowadays frequently appears in philosophy, ethnography, cultural studies, and technology studies, where it functions as a floating signifier. In this book it is applied in the same way as Heidegger used the concept of *Welt* – with reference to the totality of things that can be *zuhanden*, present-at-hand in the world. Toiletries, stockings, underwear, trousers, shirts and pullovers already had a strong attraction before ending up in the suitcase. Worlding here implies that things are brought together by being understood, handled and used. More or less out of habit they make themselves present and 'call for each other' before the suitcase is taken out of the closet. Their interrelation is so contingent that it can only be partially verbalised and intellectualised. When things are worlding they need no words, but are there, ready-to-hand. Just as the farmer's tools refer to one another, a wardrobe contains items that are ingrained prereflectively from an early age.