

Editorial

Feminist Encounters: Special Issue on Slow Intimacy

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Over many years a group of feminist colleagues from many different academic disciplines (colleagues who also became friends), honed and shaped ideas for feminist projects, papers or engagement with the academic institution where we work. We call ourselves the Feminist Study Group that is linked to the South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) Chair in Gender Politics (Amanda Gouws) at Stellenbosch University. The ideas for this conference that took place in October 2022 were derived from discussions of the Feminist Study Group. Our Call for Papers below embodied some of these ideas.

THE CALL

Our first tentative steps toward vocalising the importance of intimacy and slowness, was in our call for papers for a conference¹ that we entitled ‘Slow intimacy’. In our call for contributions we said the following:

The verb ‘to intimate’ refers to the action of showing what you know. The noun ‘intimacy’ refers to an interaction in which a person knows something and then shows that they know and what they know to another. This intimate interaction can be with a person, other living things, inanimate objects, the planet. The adjective ‘intimate’ refers to that what is known or those who know and are known, those who show and get shown. The knowing or familiarity associated with intimacy can be cognitive or emotional or both and is often embodied. In intimate interactions you can show, manifest or perform the knowing in different ways: through language, art, music, physical actions, often involving skills and bodily habits. Intimate performance is involved in quotidian everyday actions (sex, sports, shopping, delivering a baby, breast-feeding, parenting, cooking, gardening, housework, household conflict, work) as much as in extraordinary ones (Olympic-level figure skating, an authoritative, yet daring execution of a Chopin piano concerto, a mother murdering her children, war). Both knowing and showing can be explicit or implicit, conscious or unconscious. Intimate knowing can manifest as a showing that has the potential to be immensely powerful, ranging from showings that are nurturing and loving to showings that are cruel and destructive.

Recently, feminist and queer studies have turned to the concept of intimacy both as subject and as an analytic rubric (Berlant, 1998; De Araújo and Roy, 2022; Falkof, Phadke and Roy, 2022). In this conference the focus will be on what we call *slow intimacy*, intimate interactions that are enduring, long-standing, in process, and in development over time. We seek to explore processes of knowing and showing that are subtle and nuanced, complex, multi-layered and intricate. We also aim to explore the processes of knowing and showing associated with slow intimacy: Who gets to know and who gets to show? In what conditions are knowing and showing possible? How is intimacy tied to power and how is it informed or shaped by larger societal processes (political, social, economic)? *Slow intimacy* takes place in different sites, on different scales and involves different types of showing. The showing associated

¹ This conference was based on the format of a conference on Slow Violence that was organised by Professor Lou-Marié Kruger in 2015 (Kruger, 2015).

with *slow intimacy* can involve intellectual, sexual and cultural repertoires, as well as aesthetic and performative modes.

We are inviting papers or performances that engage with the topic of *slow intimacy*. We encourage potential participants to respond to and interpret the notion of an intimacy that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and dispersed over time. We do this, aware that there is a certain temporal dialectic at work in every instance of intimacy: it might take a lifetime to gain the knowing that goes into a fleeting showing.

In this conference the emphasis is also on the challenges of representation: how to represent *slow intimacy*. We want to explore ways of making an intimacy that may be relatively unseen and unrecognisable, visible and recognisable in conscious and creative ways. We hope that potential participants will engage with the concept of *slow intimacy* intellectually, but that the engagement will be expressed in different modalities including creative non-fiction, fiction, visual art, music, poetry and film. Such different representations will not only serve to make invisible intimacy visible, but also expose the constructive and destructive power that may be associated with *slow intimacies*.

THE CONFERENCE

The quality and the diversity of the proposed papers for the conference far surpassed our wildest imaginings. We immediately could see that both the terms ‘intimacy’ and ‘slow’ had some kind of meaning for South African scholars. The contributions include stories of intimate relationships with mothers, fathers, siblings, lovers, partners, friends, colleagues, patients and political comrades. In very moving ways many contributors referred to intimacy with nature: the sea, forests, gardens, trees, horses, dogs, the earth. Contributors highlighted how intimate spaces are always and inevitably political: the experience of intimacy is informed by political issues such as gender, race, class, culture, sexuality, disability, but context (north/south, developed/developing) also matters. There were stories about how intimacy or the lack thereof can be represented by a piece of clothing, a meal, a drawing, a poem, a painting, a portrait, a photograph, a magazine article, a newspaper clipping, a novel, a film or a social media post. It was clear that intimacy, in the minds of contributors, related to many human emotions: joy, amazement, elation, laughing, hope, but also pain, grief, mourning, melancholia, anxiety, terror, shame and guilt. The papers received seemed to map the human condition in late modernity, our longing for closeness and the ever-elusive certainty that closeness is indeed possible.

However, while there was so much hope in the presentations at the conference, despair was also present in many of the presentations. There were many papers about illness and death, about violence, necropolitics (Mbembe, 2008) and loss. In our call for papers we emphasised the constructive potential of intimacy, but also wondered about the destructive potential of intimacy. Our contributors certainly talked about the dark side of intimacy in explicit and implicit ways.

The conference itself (Loff, 2022), for all of us who attended it, was a very intimate experience. It was as if in the togetherness of a community of feminist scholars we could experience intimacy and the profound emotions associated with intimacy. We laughed and cried, we were shocked and outraged, horrified, moved and upset. It was a different kind of scholarly experience, where the intellectual knowledge and theory that we so cherish, were juxtaposed with an emotional experience where we got to see each other as not only scholars but also as human beings with feelings.

Apart from the conference being in line with the affective turn in feminism (Ahmed, 2004, 2006, 2017; Koivunen, 2001; Kruger 2020), the conference also represented a very clear departure from traditional academic scholarship. Presentations included academic papers, poetry, literature, reading from a play, video material and works of art. We combined the conference with two arts exhibitions that we commissioned, that one of the Feminist Study Group members, Prof Stella Viljoen, with a colleague, Prof Ernst van der Wal, curated. The art works complemented the conference in multi-layered ways. Not only were there different ways of knowing, there also were different ways of showing what we know.

We experienced the conference not only as radical in terms of the knowledges that the scholars communicated, but also radical in terms of how the knowledge was showed. It was a slow unfolding of knowledge that involved a meeting between the cerebral and the emotional; of what is experienced and witnessed and then shared in a verbal form. There were only plenary sessions at the conference so that everyone heard all the papers. This created a fertile environment for sincere and candid discussions, and the sharing of understandings that were often difficult to verbalise.

THE SPECIAL ISSUE

We were delighted that *Feminist Encounters* agreed to publish a special issue on *Slow Intimacy*. This is obviously a feminist journal, willing to publish radical content and radical ways of representing this content. Again, putting together this special issue was a rather profound experience. Our contributors submitted their presentations in publishable form in a record time, reviewers reviewed papers carefully and considerately, but quickly. It was again an experience of a certain form of intimacy. Feminist scholars thinking and feeling about contributions without ever losing their critical and scholarly sharpness.

We trust that this special issue will in some way engage with what we know about intimacy and slow intimacy, but that the papers will also challenge scholarship as we know it, by representing different ways of showing what we know.

It saddens us deeply that as we write this Introduction, the war between Israel and Palestine is raging (Butler, 2023). The war between Russia and the Ukraine has not let up since February 2022. The body count is high and many of us fear an escalation of violence and political instability in the Middle East. This is a moment in human history that we will look back upon and ask ourselves ‘how did we get here?’ Maybe we are already asking ourselves this question about the relentless violence globally, the precarious living conditions (Butler, 2004) in which many people are not sure if they will survive another day, the deteriorating effects of populism on the body politic and the rise of right-wing nationalism and anti-gender ideology. These wars are a spectacular display of fast and slow violence (Kruger, 2014; Nixon, 2011) which let many of us retreat to slow intimacy, to the beauty of words, art and music – to the things that make us human and make us see that to be human can also be a ‘thing of beauty’, of vulnerability towards each other, of care in the midst of relentless violence.

The conference followed on the heels of the COVID pandemic (Gouws and Ezeobi, 2021), when lockdown was still fresh in our memories. The loneliness of lockdown, the grief of losing loved ones, the disconnect between the global North and global South regarding vaccines and access to protective equipment formed the backdrop to this conference.

Additionally, in South Africa, we are still struggling with the aftermaths of the slow violence of colonialism, apartheid, capitalism and patriarchy. All these themes are represented in the papers included in this special collection.

As you, the reader, read these articles you will notice that they embody understandings of our relationships with ourselves, with others, with non-human species and the planet. We do hope that there is, even if virtually, an experience of slow intimacy.

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLES

Gabeba Baderoon, a South African poet and academic, starts this special issue with two poems, ‘I Forget to Look’ and ‘The History of Intimacy’. The first is about her mother’s experience of training as a doctor during Apartheid, where she was not allowed to observe an autopsy of a white person. The second poem shows several snapshots of growing up in the weird intimacy of Apartheid South Africa.

Different types of family or domestic intimacy are the topics of the next four articles. Sally Ann Murray’s evocative autoethnographic work, ‘... Trans ... Forming ... M/othering ...’, takes a verbally playful approach to her own experience of mothering a trans child, while Pierre de Vos gives us a series of vignettes of his family as they prepare to say goodbye to their father in “‘We Hope He will be Dead by Tonight’: Shared Estrangement in the ICU of the Universitas Hospital’. Deirdre Byrne reflects on her experiences during the COVID lockdown as she comes to spend time on her own for the first time in years (‘Intimate Selves: A Poetic Inquiry into Self-Knowledge). Kopano Ratele considers what is needed to change South Africa’s history of violence in ‘We Won’t be Able to Change How We Fight Without Changing How We Love’, through an in-depth look at masculinity. In part a response to this article, Charla Smith’s article “‘Do you Think I can Kill you?’ Exploring Intimate Femicide in South Africa and why Intimacy Hurts so Much’ addresses the role of patriarchy in the South African femicide epidemic, drawing on Ratele’s work and that of Nechama Brodie.

The following two articles use visual art as types of slow intimacy. ‘Drawing as Intimation (or Infatuations with Lines, Contours and Shades)’ (Ernst van der Wal) focuses on drawing as gesture and bodily intervention through the work of visual artists Katherine Bull, Tim Knowles, Yayoi Kusama, Hentie van der Merwe and Félix González-Torres. The following article by Stella Viljoen, ‘Dressing Up the Self: Feminism and the Anomalous Art of Zanele Muholi and Cindy Sherman’, explores the liminal spaces of intimacy and feminism in the art of Cindy Sherman and Zanele Muholi.

Different types of slow intimacy are delineated in the next five articles. Jeanne Ellis considers death and intimacy in 'Intimate Things, Remembrance, Elegiac Remnants' through the poetry of mourning, where ambivalences are surfaced through the wearing and reading of garments of the deceased. L. Juliana Claassens, in 'Eating (With) You: Exploring Slow Intimacy in the Book of Song of Songs and *Written on the Body* (Jeannette Winterson), Through the Lens of Food', uses a biblical text and a 20th century one to study the intimacy of food and sex, as well as the ever-present sense of death and decay. 'Wild Sea Swimming as a Slow Intimacy: Towards Reconfiguring Scholarship' shows the hydrofeminist scholarship of Viviene Bozalek, Nike Romano and Tamara Shefer as an alternate form of slow scholarship, where swimming-writing-reading considers the relationship of humans and the ocean. Sandra Swart, in her article, 'Shared Skin: The Slow Intimacy of Horse and Rider', discusses the long history of the horse-human relationship and shows how feminist thinking can help challenge stereotyping by thinking about the intimacy at the heart of horse-human relationships. Jaco Barnard-Naudé uses Jacques Lacan's idea of extimacy to explore slow reflection and love in his article 'And Losing Thus the Boundary / Of the finite me, / Diffusing Outward, I Approach / The Edges of Infinity' (Plath, 2020: 133) - the Two Dimensions of Extimacy in Contemporary Psychoanalytic Thought'.

Two of the articles in the special issue concern activism and solidarity. 'When the Rainbow is Bittersweet: Being Queer and Indian in Durban' (Debjyoti Ghosh, Siona O'Connell and Vasu Reddy) explores the struggle of making a documentary film with a minority population within one such minority population – Queer and Indian – in Durban, the site of the largest number of Indians outside India. This is followed by 'The Intimacy of Held Solidarity: A Joint Memoir of Activism' in which Marion Stevens and Makhosazana Xaba talk about the slow intimacy of their personal and professional relationship over many years while working together on reproductive health.

The intimacies of death play themselves out in different ways in the works of the last three authors in this collection: 'Some Melancholic Musings about the Slow Intimacy of Grief: "(M)y Story Always Arrives Late"', by Lou-Marié Kruger, is an elegy to grief and not knowing seen through three stories. Amanda Gouws's article, 'The Slow Intimacy of Necropolitics', addresses the way in which unmournable bodies are represented in media and redistributed through a slow intimacy of necropolitics. The special issue ends with Jacques Coetzee's poems, 'An Illuminated Darkness'. Coetzee is a South African poet, musician, and freelance translator. He writes in both Afrikaans and English. In his poems in this issue, he explores the intimacy of letting go.

GENERAL ARTICLES

In addition to the special issue articles, we are delighted to share five research articles on other topics. The first of these is Zeliha Dişci's article 'Ideology, subject and gender: Undoing Representations in the Thought of Teresa De Lauretis and Judith Butler', in which she compares Teresa de Lauretis and Judith Butler's theorisation around ideology, subject and gender.

Alan Greig's article, 'The Polycrisis and the Centaur: Hegemony, Masculinity and Racialisation' explores the polycrisis through the intersecting lenses of masculinity and racialisation.

In 'Indigenous Women's Connection to Forest: Colonialism, Lack of Land Ownership and Livelihood Changes of Dayak Benawan in Indonesia', Nikodemos Niko, Ida Widianingsih, Munandar Sulaeman and Muhammad Fedryansyah address the plight of Dayak Benawan women in Indonesia as they face the aftermath of colonialism and its effects on their ancestral relationship with the forest.

Parvathy N and Priyanka Tripathi explore perceptions of the female fan through their reading of Hrishikesh Mukherjee's film *Guddi* in 'Female Fandom and the Anxieties of Agency: A Feminist Reading of the Indian Female Fan in *Guddi* (1971)'.

Finally, Vitalii A. Zavhorodnii, Serhii M. Perepolkin, Valentyna O. Boniak, Tetiana L. Syroid and Liudmyla A. Filianina address women's role in the armed forces in a comparative study that focuses on gender equality in the armed forces in legislation and state compliance in their article, 'Place of Women in the Armed Forces: Legislation and State Compliance with Gender Equality Policies'.

BOOK REVIEWS

This issue also has three book reviews. Wen Liu reviews Travis S. K. Kong's *Sexuality and the Rise of China: The Post-1990s Gay Generation in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China*. Anelise Gregis Estivalet reviews *Birthing Black Mothers* by Jennifer C. Nash. Ida Sabelis ends this issue with her review of *Knowledge, Power, and Young Sexualities. A Transnational Feminist Engagement* by Tamara Shefer and Jeff Hearn.

We hope that you find much to engage with, in our Spring 2024 issue.

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