

# Affective spaces, melancholic objects: ruination and the production of anthropological knowledge\*

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This article critically engages with recent theoretical writings on affect and non-human agency by way of studying the emotive energies discharged by properties and objects appropriated during war from members of the so-called 'enemy' community. The ethnographic material comes from long-term fieldwork in Northern Cyprus, focusing on how it feels to live with the objects and within the ruins left behind by the other, now displaced, community. I study Turkish-Cypriots' relations to houses, land, and objects that they appropriated from the Greek-Cypriots during the war of 1974 and the subsequent partition of Cyprus. My ethnographic material leads me to reflect critically on the object-centred philosophy of Actor Network Theory and on the affective turn in the human sciences after the work of Gilles Deleuze. With the metaphor of 'ruination', I study what goes amiss in scholarly declarations of theoretical turns or shifts. Instead, proposing an anthropologically engaged theory of affect through an ethnographic reflection on spatial and material melancholia, I argue that ethnography, in its most productive moments, is trans-paradigmatic. Retaining what has been ruined as still needful of consideration, I suggest an approach which merges theories of affect and subjectivity as well as of language and materiality.

Consider an island space, not too distant from Western Europe, where communities that had coexisted for centuries, if with tension, have begun to assume distinctly separate national identities, entering armed conflict with one another. Picture this taking place late in the 1950s, at a time of colonial dissolution and the formation of a sovereign nation-state meant to represent all the communities on this island. Strife between the two dominant communities survives the declaration of independence from colonialism, and, soon, these communities begin to move into separate, ethnically defined enclaves in faction with one another. In 1963, members of the community that is the majority on the island commit significant atrocities against members of the minority. Imagine these two communities, now already defined as distinct 'political communities', further divided from one another with the arrival of an external army which invades the northern part of the island, declaring that it does so in the interest of the minority.

\* Malinowski Memorial Lecture 2007.

I am referring to 1974, the date of the partition of Cyprus in the aftermath of the invasion of the north of the island by the Turkish army. With the arrival of Turkish troops on 20 July 1974 and their subsequent invasion of towns and villages in Northern Cyprus, thousands of Greek- and Turkish-Cypriots were turned into refugees, leaving behind their natal villages, homes, land, and belongings and moving to the side of the island designated for their separate habitation after the war (see Loizos 1975; 1981). Turkish-Cypriots who happened to live in southern towns and villages escaped to the north, now under Turkish sovereignty, to protect themselves from Greek nationalist reprisals. Greek-Cypriots who lived in the north moved in great numbers to the south, experiencing and fleeing major brutalities during the war.

Now, consider a situation where thousands of people displaced from one part of an island, losing their properties, homes, animals, land, and personal belongings, and leaving behind their neighbours, co-villagers, colleagues, and friends from the other community, find themselves elsewhere (north), allocated spaces, land, and homes to use, own, and inhabit, properties just abandoned by the other community, which had fled from the invading army in the opposite (southward) direction. Two ethnically defined communities have been separated from one another with borders patrolled by armies on either side, not allowed to visit the other part of the island, each other, or their natal villages and towns for three decades, with access across the border banned. (Turkish-Cypriot refugees were mostly allocated Greek-Cypriot houses, land, and belongings by the Turkish-Cypriot administration in the north.) Consider these refugees using, inhabiting, employing, and interacting with spaces and properties left behind by the former community (Greek-Cypriots) during the war. Living in the village of members of the other community officially construed as 'the enemy'. What is left of social relations with the other community is the other community's objects. What remains, as well, is the memory of a sociality which included the other community in the recent past. Relations with the other community persist in the imagination through interactions and dealings with their abandoned properties, spaces, and belongings. When they appropriated Greek-Cypriot villages, land, and houses, Turkish-Cypriots often recounted to me stories of how they found rotten food on set dinner tables, left behind by Greek-Cypriot evacuees at the sound of sirens when Turkish troops arrived in Northern Cyprus. Others gave accounts of suitcases full of personal belongings which they found, thrown on the side of the road, by fleeing Greek-Cypriots unable to carry the weight at the height of war. Turkish-Cypriots appropriated these leftover objects and belongings. Having been stripped of their own things in the south as they were displaced to the north, some refugees had to wear garments left behind by the Greek-Cypriots, cleaning them in the rivers.

But what is significant, as my Turkish-Cypriot friends and informants have often told me, is that many started going on 'looting hunts' ('*ganimet avi*'), as they called them, visiting house after house in abandoned Greek-Cypriot villages and neighbourhoods and taking furniture, kitchenware, household utensils, washing machines, refrigerators, sheets, and bedding for themselves. All these objects were picked from the houses of the Greek-Cypriots, from amidst their personal spaces and belongings, with family photos hanging on the walls, personal diaries in drawers, and books with names inscribed in them. Here, there is a world of the imagination which is triggered upon entering evacuated dwellings to search for items of use. There is an imagination of how members of the other community might have lived in that house before the war, sitting on that sofa, cooking lunch in that kitchen, and picking olives in those fields.

Turkish-Cypriots were left to relate to the other community in their absence, but in the presence of their objects, animals, dwellings, spaces, environment, and belongings. The only embodied presence that was left of the other community in Northern Cyprus was their corpses. A Turkish-Cypriot couple told me the story of how they buried the body of a Greek-Cypriot, killed during the war, whom they imagined might have been the owner of the house they were assigned to live in.

This article concerns itself with a community significantly made up of refugees who, having been dispossessed of their own belongings and finding themselves in a new spatial zone and political contingency, assumed, out of will, circumstance, or coercion, the properties and belongings of another community officially construed as 'the enemy'. With the erection of a military border, the Turkish-Cypriots were banned from interacting on a person-to-person or inter-subjective level with the Greek-Cypriots. They were able to relate to the other community only through the objects which the Greeks had left behind. In fact, it could be argued that the Turkish-Cypriot community recreated itself as a 'community' by (literally and metaphorically) garbing itself in the other (Greek-Cypriot) community's clothes, creating an 'economy' significantly out of the objects and properties belonging to the Greek-Cypriots, and a political system that would not only gloss over but also explicitly organize, administer, and support such misappropriation and possession.

A local moral discourse exists in relation to the use of properties, land, and belongings owned by the Greek-Cypriots. To this day, and over thirty years after partition, Turkish-Cypriots refer to things and especially land and houses belonging to the other community as 'Greek property' (*Rum mali*), ethnicizing and personifying the properties which they use. But further, and more significantly, Turkish-Cypriots refer to properties which they appropriated from the Greek-Cypriots as 'loot'. The word they use to refer to 'loot' in the Turkish-Cypriot idiomatic sense is *'ganimet'*. *Ganimet* is a word with symbolic roots that go back to the Ottoman period. In Ottoman-Turkish, *ganimet* referred to war booty or trophy. In its contemporary Turkish-Cypriot usage, *ganimet* is evoked not for any military triumphalism, but to refer, specifically and in a self-reprimanding mode, to Greek property and objects which were appropriated by the Turkish-Cypriots in the aftermath of war. This is no neutral or apolitical term for an 'object' or 'thing'. There is a self-critical moral commentary in Turkish-Cypriot uses of the term *ganimet* where there is an element of regret or reflexive ethical evaluation. Turkish-Cypriots will speak of the '1974 rich' to refer to those amongst them whose prospects improved after the war by way of misappropriating and exchanging Greek property. They also critique themselves and their own community more generally, by saying 'Everyone's hand has been dirtied by plunder'. Of course, Turkish-Cypriots also have ways of qualifying or rationalizing the looting of Greek property that went on in 1974 and after, arguing that Greek-Cypriots did quite similar things to Turkish properties that remained in the south. In reflecting upon 'loot', Turkish-Cypriots will also say: 'What could we have done, having lost all of our own property to the Greeks in the south?' Meanwhile, the administration in Northern Cyprus, a self-declared state unrecognized by the United Nations, approves and encourages the use, exchange, and sale of Greek property under the guise of maintaining and improving the economy. In fact, the administration has granted 'title deeds' (*kocan*) to users of Greek property in Northern Cyprus, therefore locally 'legalizing' this appropriation, even though it is considered a crime under international law (Navaro-Yashin 2007).

Now, if there is a political regime that would normalize and rationalize the appropriation and use of another community's belongings, there is, as I have suggested, a competing local moral discourse, created, against all odds, by the Turkish-Cypriots themselves, to question and critique plunder. But in the arena of such conflictual politics and symbolic language, what interests me is the affect that is generated in a community that has re-created its life and livelihood significantly on the basis of objects and properties belonging to another community which was officially coined as 'the enemy'. How does it feel to live in an appropriated house? What is it like to take care of orange groves belonging to a villager of the other community who lost his property? What of household furniture assembled by way of going on 'looting expeditions' in the aftermath of war? What sort of affect is exuded by dwellings, objects, and spaces left behind by another community after a cataclysmic war? What affect does such an exchanged and appropriated environment discharge? Here, I am interested in two things at once: one, the subjectivity of Turkish-Cypriots inhabiting expropriated dwellings, and the emotions engendered amongst the Turkish-Cypriots in living in such properties; and, two, the affect generated by the assumed objects, appropriated dwellings, and the broader post-war environment itself.

Turkish-Cypriots reflected a melancholic interiority during the period when I did intensive, long-term fieldwork in Northern Cyprus (in 2001 and 2002). The notion that they widely employed to describe their condition, feeling, or inner state of being was 'maraz'. By 'maraz', the Turkish-Cypriots mean something ethnographically distinct and different from its mainland Turkish understandings. In the Turkish-Cypriot dialect and usage, 'maraz' refers to a state of mental depression, deep and unrecoverable sadness, and dis-ease, which I explore, in English, through the concept of melancholia. Many of my informants would say that the Cyprus problem was the condition which produced 'maraz' in them, historically locating or situating their state of inner lack of calm and happiness. As context for their feelings of 'maraz', they referred specifically to their state of confinement in Northern Cyprus with checkpoints closed and access to the south denied, the economic blockade and political stalemate, as well as the lack of resolution of the Cyprus problem (also see Navaro-Yashin 2003). This was a historically specific and subjective interpretation of an inner state of being and feeling. I am interested in understanding this melancholy not only as an expression of the inner worlds of my informants, but also as the mark of the energy (the affect, as I will call it) discharged upon them by the dwellings and environments they have now lived in for decades. 'I never warmed to this house', said a Turkish-Cypriot lady, referring to the Greek-Cypriot house she and her family were allocated to live in by the administration. 'We have lived in it for thirty years, but it doesn't feel as though it is ours'. 'This space feels melancholic', my informants often said, referring to the rusty and dusty surfaces of buildings left unkempt and un-maintained in Northern Cyprus since 1974. They were naming the feeling which their environment inflicted upon them. I therefore propose an anthropology of melancholia in this article by way of studying the affects generated by space and the non-human environment. What, I ask, is the role of the outer environment in engendering subjective feeling? Or, how are subjective feeling and environmentally produced affect intertwined? More specifically, what is the intersection between subjectivity and affect?

The core theoretical question of this article is about affect. Long before British psychoanalysts and anthropologists divided labour between one another, the one claiming the ground of 'psychology' and the latter that of 'sociality' (arguing that these

should not be confused), Malinowski (1927) was exploring possible areas of convergence between the psychological and the social (Kuper 1973; Stocking 1986). Here, I follow Malinowski in centring affectivity in an exploration of sociality.

My question is: Does affect emerge from the self or from the environment, from subjectivity or from the looted objects that have been kept in circulation? Is it Turkish-Cypriots' conflicted subjectivity that exudes an affect of melancholia in Northern Cyprus, or is it the rusty and derelict environment kept visibly unmaintained since the war that generates this feeling? Another way of putting this is: Are we to speak of subjectively felt or spatially effected melancholy? What concerns me is that the theoretical tools which we have in hand for studying such an ethnographic problem would have us tilting to one or the other side of these questions. My use of the either/or form in posing these questions is therefore rhetorical. Later on in this article, I study the privileging of one or the other side of these questions as a problem in regimes of knowledge production, one which I will explore through the metaphor of 'ruination'.

### **Ruination, abject and social theory**

I hold up this story of appropriation and political reconstitution as an ethnographic moment that will inform my explorations in this article. This is a story of ruination at the foundation of a new political system. By 'ruination', I refer to the material remains or artefacts of destruction and violation, but also to the subjectivities and residual affects that linger, like a hangover, in the aftermath of war or violence. This is distinct from literary or cinematic romanticizations of archaic ruins. What emerges from my ethnographic explorations of living with and among ruins of war in Northern Cyprus is the abject quality of ruination, as distinct from its aesthetics. Objects and dwellings left behind by the Greek-Cypriots have been assigned and ascribed, in my interpretation, an abject quality by the Turkish-Cypriots. By ruination I therefore refer to an intimate involvement with the abject or abjected material. 'Would we have wanted to wear the dirty linen of the Greeks?' one of my informants said, in reference to garbing herself with clothes left behind by Greek-Cypriot escapees after the war. A clean item of clothing left in a Greek-Cypriot wardrobe (a 'ruin' of war) feels 'dirty' (what I study as 'abject') to the Turkish-Cypriot who is to wear it because of the knowledge that it has been misappropriated (and is classified as 'loot'). The reference to 'dirt' by my informant who garbed herself in clothes left behind by the Greek-Cypriots is, I would suggest, a self-reflexive and conscientious moral commentary on the status of the person who uses things which belong to others. The 'dirt', therefore, in the self-reflection, is a critical reference to the self who is to be donned with the objects of another. Things left behind by the Greeks, the ruins of war, were associated with an abject quality by my Turkish-Cypriot informants. Abject matter, in this case, refers to things assumed through an act of violation. Here objects and environments have been left behind not because they were redundant, but because they could not be carried along at the height of war when their owners were turned into refugees. Therefore, when I study appropriated objects as 'the abject', I do so in intimacy with Turkish-Cypriot representations of these things as plunder ('*ganimet'*), as property assumed as an act of violation. I speak of a context where abjected material has been recycled, domesticated, and incorporated, quite creatively in fact, if self-consciously, into the social order. A new political system has been formed by way of assuming the abject. Such a merging of the self with abjected matter, the wearing and donning of the ruins of another community, should push us towards a new conceptualization of abjection.

I want to begin the development of my argument by referring to Mary Douglas's famous work *Purity and danger* (1966). For Douglas, it is against filth that society is formed, or by defining and excluding that which is 'dirty'. Defilement, for Douglas, is a practice which marks the boundaries of a social system. In fact, defilement is a process of cleansing the social-symbolic order from 'filth', which is perceived as 'danger' (also see Kristeva 1982: 65-7). For Douglas, a certain symbolic 'purity' is necessary for the making of social propriety. Here filth is imagined necessarily to lie at the outer contours of a social order; if it were not for this imagination of dirt, coupled with social practices of cleanliness, there would be no 'social organization', in this reading. 'Dirt is essentially disorder', writes Douglas (1966: 2). In a rather romantic representation of the 'social', I would say, Mary Douglas construes 'the social' as essentially 'pure'.

Building strongly upon Douglas's arguments, we have the psychoanalytic work of Julia Kristeva, who studies 'the abject' not only as that which contradicts the social order, but also as the negative counterpart to the ego. For Kristeva, abjection is an othering process through which the individual attempts to maintain and protect her psychological integrity. 'The abject', she writes, 'has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*' (1982: 1, emphasis hers). Kristeva defines as abject that which is essentially 'other' to the self. Here, subjectivity is considered to be constituted in necessary opposition to the abject. 'The abject is that which is not me'. Or, it is against 'that', that dirty, filthy thing, which I define and identify myself as having an integrity. But in Kristeva's work the abject is a boundary which protects and challenges psychological integrity at one and the same time. She argues that as far as it is pushed away (or banished from) subjectivity, the abject keeps harrying the ego incessantly from where it has been cast out (also see Grosz 1989). Therefore, she studies that constant tension or collision between ego and the abject.

In contrast, in my own material, I explore what can be learned from an observation of the domestication of the abject, its recycling, its normalization, assumption, and incorporation into the social order (a new one, in this case, which follows war). In the Cypriot context I have described, the abject, or 'the ruin', is not that against which the social order or political system was defined. Rather, the abject has become central to the social order or the political system itself. The abject (in this instance, objects assumed through an act of violation) is not that which is packed away in the garbage bin, the toilet, or the graveyard in order to maintain personal or social integrity. Rather, the abject is right there, in one's vicinity, environment, and domestic space, it is one's very dinner table, lounge, or bedroom, in one's midst. Abject material has been consumed, and this consumption has been generative of new subjectivities and a new political system. The abject has become not a negative counterpart ('the other') to the subjective realm or the social order, but intrinsically constitutive of it. Therefore, I argue that the abject is not an exteriority against which subjectivity and sociality are to be defined (challenging the order from without), but fundamentally an interiority: what is internally generative of a political system or what is intrinsic to the system in and of itself. So, in place of Kristeva's proposition 'the abject is that which is not me', reflecting on my Turkish-Cypriot informants' positionality, I would change this as follows: 'The abject is so much inside me now that I don't know who I would be without it'.

But to study violation and abjected matter at the heart of law and politics, we need to turn to other theoretical resources. It is Walter Benjamin, more than anyone else, who teaches us that 'culture is a ruin' (Dirks 1998: 10). '“Construction” presupposes “destruction”', Benjamin wrote in his *Passagen-Werk* (quoted in A. Benjamin &

Osborne 1994: x). He meant this not only as an observation of history – the apocalyptic emergence of a new dawn (or a new political order) in the aftermath of destruction – but also as a philosophical and ethical commentary on the production of knowledge. In his ‘Critique of violence’ (1998), Benjamin deciphers the violence that is constitutive of legal and political systems. In this reading, violation is the underlying condition for the production of emergent forms of politics and social life.

But in Benjamin, every commentary on the making of politics and history is also intended as a contribution to a philosophy of knowledge. This approach to knowledge is not one that asserts a transcendental philosophy of truth, but rather one that portrays knowledge as fragmentary, like the shards, debris, or rubble left behind after a cataclysm or catastrophe. From reading Benjamin, I derive the idea that ruination lies at the heart of modern regimes of knowledge, including our own mechanisms of academic knowledge production. Here, I would like to invite the reader to consider ‘ruination’ not only as constitutive and descriptive of a political (and ‘legal’) system, or its foundations, but also as a motif through which to reflect upon the making of knowledge, including our own practices of knowledge production as anthropologists.

I would like to ponder for a moment and reflect with the reader on a famous aphorism of Benjamin’s:

A Klee painting named ‘Angelus Novus’ shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned towards the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress (1970: 257-8).

Further on in this article, as I discuss emergent theories of affect and objects, I would like to suggest, following Benjamin, that knowledge production is subject to ruination, to the piling of debris behind us. Here I refer to the association of innovation in knowledge with the ruination of past approaches. Famously, Thomas Kuhn (1970) called the tendency in ‘normal science’ to associate progress in knowledge with the defeat of previous frameworks ‘paradigm shifts’ or ‘scientific revolutions’. He argued that more than ‘call[ing] forth new sorts of phenomena’, modern science works by ‘mopping up’ data which would not fit the neat box of the paradigm (1970: 24). Now, arguably anthropologists do not work with ‘paradigms’ in Kuhn’s sense (Strathern 1987). And yet, there is a tendency in scholarly practice – and this is not peculiar to anthropologists – to associate innovation with the refuting or discarding of previous or other theoretical approaches or conceptual apparatuses: often their outright negation. I find Kuhn’s notion of ‘paradigm shifts’ instructive, then, not as a literal description of what goes on in anthropology and allied disciplines, but as an imaginative metaphor for how progress in knowledge is tracked and traced. I interpret the most contemporary regimes of knowledge production in which we are all embedded, which refers straight to ‘audit cultures’ in Marilyn Strathern’s sense of the term (2000), as that Benjaminian ‘storm’ called progress. Against the force of this storm, therefore, I would like to remain, like my Turkish-Cypriot informants who invoke ruination and abjection against all odds, in the midst of the piles of the debris of knowledge production.

In this article, I will be referring to two rather recent movements in socio-cultural theory which would present themselves as theoretical 'turns' by way of negating other conceptual approaches and apparatuses. I am not sure whether we can call them 'paradigms', or the influence which they have motivated 'paradigm shifts', but Actor Network Theory and the 'affective turn', following the work of Gilles Deleuze, have been presented by certain scholars as though they were so (see Henare, Holbraad & Wastell 2007; Thrift 2004). With the metaphor of 'ruination', I shall be exploring what goes amiss in attempts by anthropologists and scholars in associated disciplines to discard old conceptual apparatuses with the introduction of new ones. I would like to ask: What can be learned from maintaining within the frame of analysis that which has been ruined?

### Objects of violence

I would like now to return to the appropriated dwellings, assumed fields, and looted objects which I started to describe at the beginning of this article. Recall my reference to the built and natural environment which the Turkish-Cypriots had been allocated to live in, through the practices of their administration, specifically in spaces which used to belong to the Greek-Cypriots. I would like to pause on the question: How does an appropriated home feel? Likewise, on the question: What is it like to use a looted object (a pot, for example, for cooking, or a porcelain plate, for eating)? Again, what sort of affect is generated out of an appropriated village field with carobs and olives picked from trees for consumption or for sale?

As I ponder on these key ethnographic questions, I am interested in exploring the limitations of ethnographic works that would privilege one theoretical framework or methodology to the detriment of another. My core question here is: Is the affect of melancholy experienced in relation to looted objects and properties a projection of their users' subjectivities onto the objects or an energy discharged out of these objects themselves?

Here, I find it helpful to think my material through the exercises proposed by Actor Network Theory. I will refer specifically to the work of Bruno Latour. I read Latour's work as a contribution to Foucault's critique of humanist philosophy or the philosophy of the subject. Latour has written against the privileged ascription of agency to human beings, arguing that, as 'actants' of sorts, 'non-human entities' too may be interpreted as effecting 'agency' (Latour 1993). In a recent work on politics, Latour has written: 'It's not unfair to say that political philosophy has often been the victim of a strong object-avoidance tendency' (2005a: 15). '*Back to Things!*' is the motto of Latour's work (as well as of others working with Actor Network Theory) (2005a: 23, his emphasis). The point of this dictum is to effect a shift from a subject- to an 'object-oriented' philosophy (2005a; also see Henare *et al.* 2007).

Thinking through my material from Northern Cyprus, I agree with Latour that there is a need to attend to the centrality of objects in the making of politics. The ethnographic account at the start of this article illustrates, akin to Latour's intentions, the embroilment of subjects with objects, in this case, seized from other subjects. Indeed, as I have argued above, a new body politic has been fashioned in Northern Cyprus out of appropriating, using, and exchanging objects captured by violation from other people. I am therefore interested in the thingliness of politics.

And yet, I find that Latour's work is limited in its *qualification* of objects and their politics. Latour argues, without ethnographic specification or historicization, that

subjects and objects are always and already engaged with and entangled in one another, imagining a flat or horizontal 'network' of assemblages between human and non-human entities transcendently and at all times, without qualification or interpretation. In fact, 'flattening' is a methodology which Latour intentionally prescribes in an attempt to generate symmetry between different modes of agency (see Latour 2005*b*: 165-72). But thinking through my material, I shall argue differently. The relation which people forge with objects must be studied in historical contingency and political specificity. If persons and objects are assembled in a certain manner, I would argue that this is not because they always, already, or anyway would do so. Rather, 'assemblages' of subjects and objects must be read as specific in their politics and history. In my case, the Turkish-Cypriots' relations with looted objects is an assemblage of sorts forged in the aftermath of an act of sovereignty: a declaration of war, the erection of a border to delineate distinction between two ethnically defined communities, and a long-term state of emergency (see Agamben 2005). Reading 'sovereignty' in this specific arrangement of persons and things qualifies 'the network' and locates it historically. This particular assemblage of human and non-human entities – the one I have been studying – is no neutral assembly. Rather, it has been created by way of keeping certain people and things out, by excluding them, in this case with the erection of a border as a mark of sovereignty. The meeting of persons with certain categories of persons is banned; the union of humans with their own non-human belongings is disallowed. Indeed, and further, many people are excluded from this network altogether because their lives or livelihoods have been spared. Therefore, the 'network' cannot be theorized as an all-inclusive or pervasive, transcendental phenomenon. Marilyn Strathern has suggested a methodology of 'cutting the network' (1996). '[I]f networks had lengths they would stop themselves', she writes, identifying a problem in the 'limitlessness' of Latour's notion of the network (1996: 522-3). In my own research, it is sovereignty which does the 'cutting'. Latour's horizontal and two-dimensional imaginary of 'the network', then, has to be complemented with a theory of sovereignty and history which introduces qualified verticality and multiple dimensionality.

Now, with its emphasis on objects, Latour would like explicitly to urge a post-linguistic and post-hermeneutic shift in social theory. In fact, I read Actor Network Theory (ANT) as a direct attack on the 'linguistic turn' associated with post-structuralism and deconstruction (see, e.g. Latour 2005*b*: 11). Arguably there is an attempt to define the contours of a new 'paradigm' (quite akin, in this case, to Thomas Kuhn's sense of it) against the dominance of social constructionism in the human sciences, with its emphasis on language and subjectivity. If language is predominantly what identifies 'the subject' and differentiates him or her from other entities, then I read ANT as a critique of the anthropocentrism of social constructionism. So, as the object (or visible matter and evidence) takes primacy, language, representation, the imagination, interpretation, and the subjective are 'mopped up' (in Kuhn's sense) in this new methodology. I study this as a form of 'ruination' in knowledge production.

Objects are not involved in relations with human beings in a linguistically or symbolically neutral arena. Objects are, rather, qualified through language. They could be neither pre- nor post-linguistic. Nor could they be non-symbolic. Remember what my Turkish-Cypriot informants call the objects which they use: 'Greek property', '*ganimet*', or 'loot'. Likewise, recall the moral discourses and ideologies that battle over the representation of objects in Northern Cyprus. Latour would like to situate the political in things. But with his attack on the linguistic turn in the social sciences, he 'mops up'

(or 'ruins') theoretical vantage-points that suggest that objects are discursively qualified as well.

As welcome as its emphasis is on the agency of 'non-human actants', in its paradigmatic efforts to re-constitute the object of social analysis (identifying it literally and materially as an 'object'), ANT has so much tilted the see-saw towards studying 'non-human' entities that all methodologies for studying 'the human' (including non-essentialist theoretical approaches) are deemed antithetical to its efforts. Or, if 'the human' has not altogether disappeared in ANT frameworks, accounts of it have become extremely impoverished. Here, I certainly do not mean to call for a return to the philosophy of the subject or to humanist philosophy by reinstating the highly problematic notion of 'the human'. I am, rather, reflecting on what gets 'mopped up', once again, with declarations of 'theoretical turns'. As they ardently keep any inferences to 'the human' (or anything associated with human subjectivity or interiority) fearfully at bay, so do actor-network theorists limit themselves in their imagination of any agency that is also or especially 'human' in its associations, like the imagination or the emotions (see also Thrift 2000: 215). If we were to limit ourselves to an ANT framework or methodology, we would have to call off any query into 'affect' as referring to 'human' factors too.

Tendencies in knowledge production which would identify their object of analysis and methodology by way of negation (the refuting or discarding of other theoretical approaches) have a way of bringing the anthropologist to an impasse *vis-à-vis* his or her ethnographic material. So is it in recent emphases on 'non-human agency'. As significant as its contribution is to social theory and ethnographic methodology, ANT, by its rhetoric, makes it difficult to imagine a reconciliation with other theoretical approaches that include a consideration of (non-essentialist) human capacities for imagination and affectivity. But a reconciliation is exactly what I mean to generate through this discussion.

### Affective spaces

Picture a wide plateau in the midst of an island appearing rather dry, burned by the sun, exhibiting various shades of yellow and brown. The plain appears to be limitless to the eye, except that it is spotted with a few trees in the mountain on the horizon. Thistles, prickly bushes, and dry plants cover the surface of the plateau. 'This whole area on the skirts of the mountain used to be so green', says Hasan, a Turkish-Cypriot,

before the big fire in 1995, which is said to have been ignited by mistake from one of the army's storehouses for ammunition. All the fruit trees, carob, olive, and pine trees burned up. For a long while, I didn't want to visit this area, as it aroused immense melancholy in me. And look, now it looks like a desert.

I looked in one direction and the yellow plain appeared dry all the way the eye could see, until it got caught by a wave of heat. On one side, there was a cemetery of used cars. 'All those cars and car parts you see over there', said Hasan, 'are left from 1974', referring to the date of the war and the subsequent partition of Cyprus. He was locating what I was observing, rooting it with a specific date, a significant event.

They are cars which were left from the Greeks when they were fleeing from the war ... Many of us used Greek cars which we found parked here and there in villages, in towns, everywhere, for a long while.

Some turned the sale of looted cars into a business. But now most of these cars have gotten old; they are like museum pieces. Here they have been dumped. Maybe somebody is still making a living out of selling their spare parts.

The rusty car skeletons and the shards of the used cars lay on top of one another on one side of the plateau, reflecting the sunlight.

I turned my face towards the other side of the plain. A number of white cement structures had been erected here and closed off to access with barbed wire. Red signposts on the wire read 'military area: access banned'. 'That is a residential neighbourhood for Turkish officers and their families', said Hasan. 'We cannot walk that way; it is blocked'. And recalling what this place was like in the old days, he said: 'This used to be a picnic area adjacent to a village'. We walked through the thorns and bushes in the plateau and I asked, 'Why is this space left so unkempt? Why is it not taken care of?' And Hasan said:

What we are walking on is Greek-owned land. A lot of Greek land was allocated to Turkish-Cypriot refugees, but some who appropriated land did not develop it, out of fear that the Greeks would claim it back one day. Everyone knows the status of this land as 'loot'. It is illegally assumed property. But you know, there are a number of shrewd people amongst us who have started to develop such looted land and sell it to British expatriates. Otherwise, who would want to invest in land which legally belongs to the Greeks?

The space through which we walked exuded a feeling of melancholy which I could feel intensely. From Hasan's account, I understood that the plateau had taken this dry, unkempt, and prickly shape through time. 'Had these fields been owned with proper [legal] title deeds', said Hasan, 'this area would have been lush and green'. Hasan was suggesting that the space would not feel the same had its ownership been straightforward and uncontroversial. He was saying that, for one, the fields would be ploughed, planted, and maintained and they would produce an affect of freshness and liveliness. Instead, in the prickly fields through which we moved, the atmosphere discharged a feeling of the uncanny, a strange feeling derived, in this instance, out of a sense of impropriety, haunting, or an act of violation.

Now, I would like to ask the reader to keep this description of an ethnographic field in mind as I move on to discuss some recent theoretical work on 'affect'. I will be referring to a movement which has not influenced anthropologists as yet, but to which colleagues in allied disciplines, such as geography and cultural studies, have been referring as the 'affective turn', following the work of Gilles Deleuze (Clough & Halley 2007; Massumi 2002; Thrift 2008). That anthropologists have not yet been discussing this emergent theory of affect is probably evidence for it not being a 'paradigm' in Kuhn's sense, certainly not for anthropology. But this turn to study affect has been represented by scholars in associated disciplines as the movement which follows, critiques, and moves beyond the 'linguistic turn' in the human sciences. Significantly, the British geographer Nigel Thrift (2000) has developed what is called 'non-representational theory' along these lines. Thrift correctly argues that much of cultural theory in the last couple of decades has been dominated by an interest in texts, semiotics, and discourse, what he identifies as approaches centred on studies of 'representation'. He is referring to post-structuralism and the way it was taken up in the human sciences, including, significantly, cultural geography and (cultural) anthropology. Instead and in place of the primacy of language in such approaches, Thrift would

like to open researchers' imagination to a study of non- or pre-linguistic registers of experience, which he studies via the work of Gilles Deleuze, through the rubric of 'affect'. But what is affect?

'Affect is not simply emotion', writes Thrift, 'nor is it reducible to the affections or perceptions of an individual subject' (2000: 219). Affect *does* refer to an emotive domain, broadly speaking, but its scope goes much beyond that of subjectivity or the self. In this approach, too, as in ANT, there is a welcome move to go beyond the philosophy of the subject. Compare this, for example, with how Bruno Latour has suggested that ANT is about 'redistributing subjective quality *outside*' (1999: 23, his emphasis). The point with which I very much agree is that most theoretical work on affectivity, before this particular 'affective turn', has focused on the inner world or interiority of the human subject, coined 'subjectivity'. In the psychoanalytic tradition, for example, affect has been synonymous with subjectivity (in spite of the fact that subjectivity was studied as conflicted and split) (Borch-Jacobsen 1992). Emergent theories of affect hijack the traditional subject matter of psychoanalysis and illustrate that affectivity can be studied in sites and spaces beyond the scope of the 'human subject', his or her 'subjectivity', or 'psyche'.

Thrift's spatial theory of affect goes straight to Gilles Deleuze for its inspiration. Deleuze developed his theory of non-subjective affect by way of re-reading the works of Benedict de Spinoza. Therefore there is a huge Spinozist influence, via Deleuze, in these emergent theories of affect which I am discussing. Against the subject-centred philosophy of Descartes, which would privilege the thinking and fully conscious human being as its main and singular object of analysis, Spinoza wrote about the unity of the mind and the body. Any philosophy which would imagine cognition to be devoid of corporeality was amiss, according to Spinoza. Thought, in his reading, was embroiled in the passions, or what he called '*affectus*' (1996: 70; see also Connolly 1999; 2006). If sentiments, emotions, or feelings refer to subjective experience (or senses which can be put into discourse), '*affectus*', in Spinoza's sense, refers to a sensation which may move through the subject, but is not known to it (that is, it is unmediated by the cognitive, or the thinking and knowing, and talking subject). There is a 'lack of subjectivity' in Spinoza's philosophy (Žižek 2004: 34-5).

Deleuze's own theory of affect follows this post-subjective trajectory. 'Affects are not feelings', writes Deleuze, 'they are becomings that go beyond those who live through them (they become other)' (Deleuze in Thrift 2000: 219). Deleuze is referring to sensual intensities that may move through human bodies, but that do not necessarily emerge from them. The reference-point for affect (which used to be, singularly, subjectivity) has been radically altered and multiplied in this approach, making it possible to read many other things, such as space and the environment, as affective (Massumi 2002). The notion of 'affect' in the Deleuzian interpretation, then, is diametrically opposed to any theory of subjectivity, including, and especially, the psychoanalytic notion of 'the unconscious'.

Just as ANT could be read as a critique of the 'linguistic turn' in the human sciences, as I argued before, so is the Deleuzian turn to affect a reaction to the centrality of discursivity in the human sciences. In fact, as Deleuze and Guattari's works can be read as a direct attack on psychoanalysis, so are they as explicitly critical of linguistics (see 2004: 13). Guattari has specifically argued that 'affect is non-discursive' (1996: 159). Not about language, affect is pre- or extra-linguistic. Guattari speaks of a sensation which is 'scenic or territorializing [in its] dispositions' (1996: 160). Affect, in his terms, is 'hazy

and atmospheric' (1996: 158). It is the non-discursive sensation which a space or environment generates.

Deleuze and Guattari's notion of affect is as open in orientation as is their theory of spatiality. In *A thousand plateaus* (2004), the two philosophers differentiate the 'root' from their preferred notion, the 'rhizome'. Their metaphor for what they call 'the root book' is the tree, which, well installed downwards into the ground, sets out branches upwards and vertically (2004: 5). For Deleuze and Guattari, the 'root book' emblemizes Western modes of thinking. The root refers to genealogy, to the skywards branching out of the tree. In its verticality, the epistemology of 'the root' refers to memory, including the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious. Deleuze and Guattari observe rooting tendencies in most of the modern human sciences, not only in psychoanalysis, but also in biology, archaeology, linguistics, and history. The root traces, it locates, it creates a grid, defines structures, in this reading. Instead, Deleuze and Guattari propose the imaginary of the 'rhizome' (2004: 7). Above all, rhizomes are about multiplicity; they cannot be sited, cornered, controlled, curbed, or located. Nor can they be given any shape, structure, or hierarchy. And going especially against what Deleuze and Guattari perceive as modernity's vertical or perpendicular imaginary, a rhizome moves smoothly in a plain, in an endless surface, which knows no bounds or limits. The rhizome is 'a map and not a tracing', they write, associating the trace with structure, determinacy, and genealogy (2004: 13). In turn, 'the rhizome is anti-genealogy' (2004: 12). Such remarks imply that Deleuze and Guattari conceptualize affect as rhizomatic, or see affect as the rhizome itself which is everywhere, in constant motion, and unsit-able. This is a distinctly different imagination about affectivity from that of the psychoanalytic notion of 'the unconscious', for which the two authors' metaphor would be 'the root'.

So, Deleuze and Guattari are asking us to reverse the orientation of our thinking, from a verticalist imaginary where things are grounded and rooted to the metaphor of the endless and limitless 'plateau'. 'A plateau is always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end. A rhizome is made of plateaus', which allows for multiple possibilities (2004: 24). Nigel Thrift refers to this Deleuzian horizontality as a 'cartographic' imagination which means to replace an 'archaeological' one (2000: 220).

I used the metaphor of 'the plateau' intentionally when I described the landscape of my ethnographic field of prickly bushes, thorns, and thistles growing over an appropriated and unkempt plain. I was referring to the Mesarya (Mesaoria) plain in Northern Cyprus, which, from the geographical point of view, is a 'plateau', or flat land, which lies, in this case, between two mountain ranges, the Besparmak (Pentadaktilos), on one side, and the Trodos (Troodos), on the other. Now, in Deleuze and Guattari 'the plateau', like 'nomadology', is an analytical fiction. However, it is a serious one, in that the plain is associated with openness, limitlessness, as well as potential and creativity.

The 'plateau' I described in Northern Cyprus is similar and yet different. The Mesarya plain is bisected, right through the middle, with a military border which has been in place since 1974. My informants who live in (appropriated or inherited) villages on this plain have spoken of feeling confined, entrapped, and suffocated in this slice of territory, especially in the period when I did fieldwork, before the opening of check-points on the green line between the north and south of Cyprus in 2003 (also see Navaro-Yashin 2005). Deleuze and Guattari associate the 'plateau' with free roaming, movement, multiplicity, and potential, rhizome-style. The thistles, thorns, and bushes I have described, which grow on the northern part of the Mesarya plain, may have

flourished rhizomatically, shooting off weeds in every direction, crossing over barricades and barbed wire. So has the rust grown on the surfaces of abandoned cars, dumped refrigerators, farming tools, as well as bullets which one finds on the plain, cast aside or left behind some time after the war. Rust is rhizomatic, and so is dust, which can accumulate over time, especially if a space is kept un-maintained for some reason.

And yet, I prefer to describe my ethnographic material, these prickly plants and wastelands, in terms of ruins, shards, rubble, and debris (*à la* Walter Benjamin's imagination), rather than the rhizome. What is the spatial orientation of ruins? Horizontal or vertical? Are ruins about 'roots' in Deleuze and Guattari's sense? They may well, partially, be so. My informants 'traced' the ruins around them, not just passing them by, but locating them in time and space. 'Those bullet holes are from 1963', they would say, 'whereas the bullet holes over there are from '74'. Every abandoned or seized object was sited and dated. In these tracings, '63 referred to the date when Turkish-Cypriots were attacked and massacred by Greek-Cypriot nationalists, members of EOKA, while '74 referred to the Turkish army's invasion. The affect discharged by the bullet holes was symbolized, politicized, and interpreted by my informants.

My ethnographic field is full of borders and fences erected vertically as emblems of sovereignty. The landscape of Northern Cyprus is replete with ideological paraphernalia. The star and crescent of the Turkish flag inscribed by soldiers on mountain slopes and lit up at night so as to be visible from every point on the island, including the Greek side. The words 'How Happy is the One Who Calls himself a Turk' are written in giant characters on hills overlooking the plain. Entire areas cut off from access or circulation with barrels and barbed wire (also see Navaro-Yashin 2003; 2005). Rhizomes?

Rather than casting roots against rhizomes, through my preferred metaphor of 'the ruin', I would like to suggest another kind of orientation. We said that the root is vertical, whereas the rhizome is horizontal. The ruin, however, which describes my ethnographic material, is both and neither. A ruin is rhizomatic in the sense that it grows in uncontrollable and unforeseen ways. For example, a village mudhouse abandoned during the war slowly loses its painted surface over the years, with rain and wind and lack of maintenance. The objects inside the house are looted, its windows and window sills, its doors are removed to be used elsewhere. A ruin is further ruined through time if it is not used, assumed, or inhabited. Therefore, we could say that a ruin is rhizomatic, in some senses. But a ruin is also about roots, because it is sited as a 'trace' of a historical event, it is remembered, it is kept, lamented, and cherished in the memory of those who left it behind, it is sited and noticed by those who uncannily live in it or in its vicinity, it leaves marks in the unconscious. The ruin, then, works against Deleuze and Guattari's paradigm setting (or what I have called 'ruination'). It is vertical and horizontal at the same time; both root and rhizome.

And back to the core question of this article: How to theorize affect? I would re-phrase this as follows: How would affect be theorized were we to work with the metaphor of the 'ruin' rather than the 'rhizome'? Are certain affectivities projected onto the ruins by the subjects who make them or who live in their midst? Or do the ruins exude their own affect? Once again, I would argue that both are evident. Paradigm-setting has cast subjectivity against affect, as if one cancels the other and as if one had to choose between camps of theoretical approach: a subject-centred *or* an object-orientated one. But neither the ruin in my ethnography, nor the people who live around it are affective on their own or in their own right, but both produce and transmit affect *relationally*. An environment of ruins discharges an affect of melancholy. At the same

time, those who inhabit this space of ruins feel melancholic: they put the ruins into discourse, symbolize them, interpret them, politicize them, understand them, project their subjective conflicts onto them, remember them, try to forget them, historicize them, and so on. I would very much endorse the lead of contemporary theorists of affect who, in reading Deleuze, have argued that affect must be studied in domains that are not limited to subjectivity and registers that are not only linguistic or symbolic. But, reflecting on what emerges from my ethnographic material, an observation of the affect transmitted through the rusty environment of Northern Cyprus does not lead me simply to discard language and subjectivity. For I also observed that my informants' subjectivities were shaped by and embroiled in the ruins which surrounded them. They expressed melancholic interiorities. They put their heartbreak into discourse by speaking of '*maraz*'. They talked or kept silent about the ruins. So the affect of the ruins had a subjective quality, too. My material pushes me, therefore, not simply to follow a new paradigm which would have us cast away or turn a blind eye to observations or an imagination provided by other theoretical approaches. Instead, I feel I need to maintain the scope provided by both theoretical orientations on board, in spite of the fact that they have been presented as though they were antithetical to one another. I propose to ruin neither of them.

### **Melancholic objects and spatial melancholia**

In the spirit of what I have proposed, I would like to ask: What would an anthropology of melancholia look like? The reader will see that my material calls for a conceptual merging of affect and subjectivity, object and subject, root and rhizome, verticality and horizontality, asking for three- rather than two-dimensional analysis. Ethnography works against the grain of paradigm-setting; it asks for all scopes of the imagination to be kept on board.

Therefore, in conclusion: classically, Freud (2001 [1917]) studied melancholia as an inner state of being – a psychical condition generated out of the loss of a loved object who could not be grieved over. If mourning allowed for grieving, and therefore an overcoming of the feeling of loss through the lapse of time, melancholia resisted such closure (2001 [1917]: 243-4). If in mourning the mourner was conscious of his grief and aware of the object of his feeling of loss, the melancholic was ambivalent about the target or origin of his pain, feeling the loss more unconsciously (2001 [1917]: 245). What is significant in Freud's seminal essay 'Mourning and melancholia' is that melancholia is studied fundamentally as a psychical condition referring to subjectivity, to the interiority of the human being. In (classical Freudian) psychoanalysis, melancholia is an inner state of personal feeling generated out of loss in an inter-subjective relationship. So the only kind of relation which counts is that between persons.

Judith Butler has famously expanded on Freud's theory, developing the notion of 'gender melancholy' (1997: 140). Here, the inter-subjective relation which Freud talks about, by reference to loss, is studied as gendered. The loss, in Butler's reading, refers to gender identifications, specifically homosexual love and attachments which are prohibited in cultures of compulsory heterosexuality. According to Butler, we live in 'a culture of gender melancholy' insofar as we are not allowed to grieve the loss (or unconsummation) of love for persons of the same sex (1997: 142-3). Like Freud, Butler studies 'melancholia as a specifically psychic economy', if one, in her reading, embroiled in gendered forms of subjectivation and power (via Foucault) (1997: 143). In other

words, as a student, in her words, of 'the psychic life of power', Butler is primarily a theorist of subjectivity.

Reflecting on my material, we could imaginatively expand on Butler's theory by reference to situations of so-called 'ethnic conflict'. When the person who has been lost (or spared) is one who belongs to the community of the so-defined 'enemy', the loss is not symbolized as a 'loss', and therefore it is not grieved over. Sovereignty and the making of distinct political communities (as well as the identification of 'internal enemies' or 'traitors') do not allow for the ritualized mourning of persons lost to the other side of the divide or those of a different political affiliation. The feeling of loss, not cognitively registered, can therefore generate melancholia, a psychical-subjective state where the object of loss is largely unconscious to the identity of the mourner and where, therefore, the loss is irredeemable, ambivalent, and lingering. I find that this analysis of melancholia in the spaces where I have been working, Cyprus, as well as Turkey, would be appropriate: deep and unrecognized sadness out of the inability to name what has been lost because the 'who' who has been lost (persons from the community of the so-called 'enemy', external or internal) cannot be officially known, named, recognized, or grieved over.

And yet, reflecting on my Cypriot material, I find that this analysis of melancholia which would register it singularly in the field of subjectivity or the psyche is limiting as much as it is enlightening. In its centredness on the subject, or the interior experience of the human being, it misses significant aspects of the relations that generate melancholia and loses out on possibilities of analysis. As in my ethnographic account of looted objects and ruined spaces in Northern Cyprus, 'the lost object' is not only a person (a Greek-Cypriot). Rather, in this case, the lost object (the person) is present in the life of the melancholic in the form of an actual material (or non-human) object (such as a household item, fields of olive trees, or animals). This object (whether it be a piece of furniture, the house, or the land on which it is built) reminds the persons who use or inhabit it that it, itself, is a loss to the persons who were its original owners. The affect of that loss experienced by members of the other community (in this case, Greek-Cypriots) lingers uncannily in the spaces and objects which they have left behind. And Turkish-Cypriots inhabit many of these spaces and employ, still, many of these objects. Here, melancholia is mediated through objects and non-human environments. Therefore, we can speak, in such instances and historical contingencies, of *melancholic objects*, things which exude an affect of melancholy, and *spatial melancholia*, an environment or atmosphere which discharges such an affect.

The melancholy which the Turkish-Cypriots feel, then, and the affect of melancholia which the space of Northern Cyprus exudes can only be interpreted three-dimensionally. It refers neither, exclusively, to affect nor to subjectivity, but to both. On the one hand, Turkish-Cypriots inhabit the melancholy of the other community through their left-behind objects and spaces, because the environment effects this affect. There is the Turkish-Cypriot refugees' own melancholy, having lost their own personal belongings and homes in southern Cyprus, as well as members of their own community in shootings by Greek-Cypriots during the war. But there is also another order of melancholy, having to do with violence done to others by way of appropriating their objects. The melancholy experienced, via the everyday presence of objects belonging to others, in this case, is a loss of a sense of moral integrity. This is articulated and consciously symbolized (put into discourse) by the Turkish-Cypriots, through decades of appropriation and right up to this day, as in my analysis of moral discourses around

*ganimet*. In this final interpretation, melancholy is the loss of the self to the self, the loss of a sense of the self as clean and pure. This is a feeling of an abjected self, of the object inside the self, of subjectivized or interiorized object to the point where the object is normalized and no longer recognized as such. Melancholia, then, is both interior and exterior. It refers to subjectivity and the world of objects at one and the same time. Here, beyond paradigmatic shifts and wars, theories of affect and subjectivity, as well as of objects and symbolization, demand to be merged. Social constructionism and an object-orientated approach, the linguistic and the affective turns may have been posed as antitheses of one another by the philosophers. But ethnography leads us to write against the grain of 'ruination' in being anti-, trans-, or multi-paradigmatic.

#### NOTE

Field research for this manuscript was supported by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. I would like to thank the Department of Anthropology at the London School of Economics and Political Science for their invitation to deliver the Malinowski Lecture 2007. Several friends and colleagues were most generous in reading an earlier draft of this manuscript before it was delivered as a lecture. I would like to especially thank Marilyn Strathern, Jane Cowan, Mehmet Yashin, Ruth Mandel, Charles Stewart, Andrew Barry, Georgina Born, Barbara Bodenhorn, and Caroline Humphrey in this capacity. I would also like to thank Alev Adil, Harri Englund, Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, Sian Lazar, Matei Candea, Sarah Green, Rebecca Empson, and the anonymous reviewers for the *JRAI* for their helpful comments on this article.

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## Espaces affectifs, objets mélancoliques : ruine et production de la connaissance anthropologique

### Résumé

L'article examine sous un angle critique les écrits théoriques récents sur l'affect et l'*agency* non humaine pour étudier les énergies émotives libérées par les biens et objets confisqués lors d'un conflit armé aux membres de la communauté dite « ennemie ». Le matériel ethnographique provient d'un travail de terrain de longue durée dans le Nord de Chypre, qui portait sur le ressenti de ceux qui vivent avec ces objets, dans les ruines laissées par l'autre communauté désormais déplacée. L'auteure étudie les relations des Chypriotes turcs avec les maisons, les terres et les objets qu'ils se sont appropriés sur les Chypriotes grecs lors de la guerre de 1974 et de la partition de Chypre. Le matériel ethnographique la conduit à une réflexion critique sur la philosophie centrée sur les objets de la théorie de l'acteur-réseau et sur le tournant affectif des sciences humaines à la suite des travaux de Gilles Deleuze. Par la métaphore de la « ruine », l'auteur sonde ce qui ne va pas dans les proclamations académiques de tournants théoriques et de changements paradigmatiques. En lieu et place, elle propose une théorie de l'affect engagée dans l'anthropologie, par une réflexion ethnographique sur la mélancolie spatiale et matérielle, et affirme que l'ethnographie, dans ses moments les plus productifs, est trans-paradigmatique. En gardant ce qui est « ruiné » comme digne encore de considération, l'auteure suggère une approche qui concilie les théories de l'affect et de la subjectivité et du langage et de la matérialité.

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