

Stenner, P. (forthcoming). Bridging the affect/emotion divide: a critical overview of the affective turn. Zhang, L & Clark, C. (forthcoming). *Affect Theory and Rhetorical Persuasion in Mass Communication*, Routledge.

## **Bridging the Affect / Emotion divide: a critical overview of the affective turn**

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### **Abstract**

Based on the author's research experience as a social psychologist, this chapter takes issue with the concept of affect at play in the turn to affect on the grounds that this concept is neither singular nor clear. In order to reflexively contextualise the argument made, the chapter begins with a summary of the author's own contributions to the study of emotion. The next main section provides an overview of three key sources of the affective turn, each of which presents a different concept of affect (affect as autonomous virtual intensity, as drive amplification and as unconscious psychic energy). Through a critique of Massumi's affect/emotion distinction, the chapter goes on to question perhaps the one thing that scholars of the affective turn appear to agree about: that affect and emotion are two very different things. The critique is not intended as a denial of the potential relevance of an affect / emotion distinction but a challenge to the way this distinction *has* been drawn by within the affect turn literature. The intent is to avoid the crude simplification whereby emotions are assumed to be conscious and personal affairs which are tied to clear socially available meanings.

### **Introduction**

A veritable torrent of academic activity has recently identified itself as being part of a turn to affect. However, the concept of affect at play in this work is neither singular nor clear.

This confusion is acknowledged by key figures within the affective turn. Seigworth and Gregg for example, state that “first encounters with theories of affect might feel like a momentary (sometimes more permanent) methodological and conceptual free fall”<sup>1</sup>. The main section of this chapter will provide an overview of three key sources of the affective turn, each of which presents a different concept of affect (affect as autonomous virtual intensity, as drive amplification and as unconscious psychic energy). Through a critique of Massumi’s affect/emotion distinction, I will then question perhaps the one thing that scholars of the affective turn appear to agree about: that affect and emotion are two very different things.

In questioning this distinction my intention is neither to deny the organic sub-structure of affective experience nor the importance of feelings that are felt only as vague “atmospheres”, nor the value of a distinction between the virtual and the actual (explained below). Nor do I question the existence of brain structures affording a rapid and unconscious thalamo-amygdala pathway for processing the emotional relevance of sense data around 10 msec faster than would be required by the neocortical-amygdala pathway<sup>2</sup>. This finding fleshes out earlier findings that question whether high-level cognition is a necessary condition for all emotional response.<sup>3</sup> Each of these matters is certainly worth attending to, and I am not in principle against the use of the words ‘affect’ and ‘emotion’ to mark some of these distinctions. My concern is rather with the way this distinction *has* been drawn by influential advocates of the affective turn. This has led to an unfortunate tendency to polarize

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<sup>1</sup> Greg Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, “An inventory of shimmers,” in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds., *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 44.

<sup>2</sup> Jo LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> In psychology this was called the debate over “affective primacy”. Zajonc, for example, demonstrated that subjects can “prefer” stimuli they have not consciously perceived. R. Zajonc “Feeling and thinking: preferences need no inferences”, *American Psychologist*, 35, 151–175, 1980.

affect and emotion and to arbitrarily assign emotion to conditions which are conscious, personal and tied to clear socially available meanings<sup>4</sup>. Emotions like jealousy, as I will show in the first section below, are never clearly personal. It is also highly likely that they always involve unconscious phases and typically implicate electrodermal activity and other autonomic responses. In the view I offer, the affective turn should be considered, not as a rejection, but as a deepening of the discursive turn that, as I will show in the second section below, preceded it. In raising this theoretical problem, my aim is not to accelerate the sense of conceptual free fall, but to clarify some of the confusion within affect studies. I will begin by drawing upon my own experience as a social psychologist with a research interest in the emotions that began nearly 30 years ago.

### **A summary of my own approach to the emotion of jealousy**

First it is necessary for me say something about emotion, which has been a vast, complex and multi-faceted topic within psychology for over a century<sup>5</sup>. To set the scene a bit of background is required. In 1992 I completed a PhD in the Departments of Psychology and Sociology at the University of Reading, UK. In addition to surveying the scientific literature on emotion and/or affect, my PhD work used a range of methods to examine how ordinary

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<sup>4</sup> Part of the confusion is that the same words have been used to mark different, and sometimes opposite distinctions. Within Damasio's neuroscience, for instance, emotion designates an innate bioregulatory device and he reserves the word "feeling" for the conscious experience of these biological processes, whilst "the word "affect" ... should be used only to designate the entire topic of emotion and feeling". Antonio Damasio, "A second chance for emotion", in R.D. Lane and L.Nadel eds., *Cognitive Neuroscience of Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 12-23, 16.

<sup>5</sup> For an overview, see Paul Stenner, "Emotion: being moved beyond the mainstream," in Ian Parker ed., *Handbook of Critical Psychology* (London: Routledge, 2015), 43-51.

people experience and make sense of jealousy. This work can be considered as an early contribution to critical discursive psychology and my aim was to provide empirical support for a non-dogmatic social constructionist approach to the emotions. Now in one sense it is important to understand that my work, like that of several others, was a protest against the dominant tradition of experimental psychology within social psychology and psychology more broadly. At the risk of over-simplifying (and there are many exceptions), the core of this tradition effectively ignored the societal and interpersonal context and treated psychological processes as universally shared properties of the individual mind/brain. These processes and properties were assumed ultimately to be reducible to brain activity and the job of the psychologist was to tease them apart in carefully designed experiments. Again with some notable exceptions, emotions were approached – if approached at all - as objectively demonstrable entities or behaviors to be observed from the outside and rarely, for example, as felt experiences (indeed much work built upon the behaviorist tradition of explicitly rejecting the very concept of “felt experience”). The aim, to put it crudely, was to replace the incurably subjective accounts of lay people with a scientifically objective understanding of emotions. The basic idea was that a better understanding of the psychological facts would enhance our capacity to control conduct. A typical example of this style of thinking presents jealousy (in this case an understanding of male sexual jealousy informed by a rather crude socio-biological assumption of reproductive “fitness”) as an innate urge to dominate female partners in order to enhance a man’s confidence that he is the father of her children.

My own research made three related contributions. First, it showed that jealousy is much more complicated and better understood as a multiplicity of often very different experiences, each shaped by cultural contexts and symbolic resources. I was interested in occasions of jealous experience as they unfold, event by event, in concrete interpersonal settings as parts of real historical and cultural contexts. It quickly became clear that there was

enormous variety, not just with respect to scenes that get called “jealousy”, but also with respect to how those scenes are understood from different perspectives, and subsequently acted upon. Since the aim of mainstream psychology was to find the universal natural mechanism “behind” ordinary talk and experience, this variety in ways of “constructing” jealousy was almost completely ignored in the existing literature, and so I used a technique called Q methodology to empirically demonstrate what I described as a “manifold” of multiple situated understandings. For short, this contribution could be called “jealousy as manifold”<sup>6</sup>.

Second, it was abundantly clear to me that the ways in which people talk about and make sense of jealousy are an integral part of actual occasions of experience, and can profoundly shape *what is made of* those experiences as they unfold through time. To the extent that scientific theories of jealousy enter into those ways of talking, they too become a *part of* jealous experiences. My research indicated some of the ways in which scientific accounts of jealousy get incorporated, sometimes critically, as part of lay accounts, and thus function within the psychosocial power dynamics of communication. The account of jealousy as innate response to infidelity threat, for instance, was both used and challenged as part of legal arguments in cases of partner abuse. From my perspective, this kind of psychological knowledge did not offer an objective “view from nowhere”, but was part of the subject matter social psychologists like myself wanted to study. I adopted a critical stance with respect to the knowledge claims of psychological science, and observed what I called the “social life” of that knowledge, as it was used as a cultural resource. This second contribution assumes a rather different ontology of the person than that presupposed by the mainstream experimental approach. The latter ultimately assumes the person to be a fixed and finite psychobiological

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Stenner and Rex Stainton Rogers, “Jealousy as a Manifold of Divergent Understandings: a Q methodological investigation”. *The European Journal of Social Psychology*, 28, 71-94, 1998.

mechanism governed by discoverable laws. I took the view, by contrast, that the human being is a social creature with an interest in its own being, and that the answers we propose to questions concerning our own being contribute to what we in fact become. For short, this second contribution could be called “jealousy as (in part at least) reflexively self-created process”.

Third, it clarified why emotions like jealousy are poorly understood as individual-level phenomena. An experience of jealousy always involves *relationships* and indeed always implies at least three parties: the one who is jealous (that a valued relation might be interrupted), the valued party in that relation, and a third figure (the rival) who threatens to interrupt the bond between the first two. To focus on the individual alone is to miss at least two-thirds of the action, including the ways in which jealousy is negotiated and attributed within those relationships in scenes of communication. But also, not all triadic configurations involving rivals with subjects and objects of desire are experiences of jealousy. To give just one example, if a person desires an object belonging to a “rival” but can claim no rights to that object, their experience is better described as envy. Iago is envious in relation to Othello, and so he manipulates events so that Othello is jealous (feeling that his rightful relation to Desdemona is being intruded upon by Cassio). It is this specific triadic configuration involving the actual or potential loss or transgression of a valued relation which makes a given experience a suitable candidate for being called “jealousy”. As Proust put it, what is needed for jealousy is that “our predilection should become exclusive”, or to use an expression from Simone De Beauvoir, the interruption of “an intimacy that used to belong only to me”<sup>7</sup>. For short, this third contribution could be called “jealousy as relational configuration”.

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<sup>7</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Woman Destroyed*, 122-123.

This third “relational” contribution helps explain the first “manifold” contribution about diversity of experience. Jealousy is not some inherent feature or quality which can be abstracted from that configuration, it is the *feeling of that configuration*. For this reason, many diverse events and qualities of experience can happily be called “jealousy”, so long as this basic pattern obtains. The quality of the actual experience may therefore vary enormously, since the jealous subject can be *angry* like Shakespeare’s Othello<sup>8</sup>, *fearful* like Proust’s Swann<sup>9</sup>, or *destroyed* like de Beauvoir’s Monique<sup>10</sup> (or *erotic* like Kundera’s Terez, *dramatic* like Nabokov’s Humbert, “*jerked around*” like Saunders’ Jeff, and so on).

### **The affective turn and the discursive turn**

What does this summary of my work on jealousy have to do with affect as it is discussed within the affective turn? Many today would say that jealousy has nothing to do with affect, since jealousy is an emotion whilst affect, by definition, implies “vital forces beyond emotion”<sup>11</sup>. No less an authority than Brian Massumi himself insists that one of his “clearest lessons... is that emotion and affect... follow different logics and pertain to

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<sup>8</sup> Damn her, lewd minx! O, damn her!  
Come, go with me apart; I will withdraw,  
To furnish me with some swift means of death  
For the fair devil.

<sup>9</sup> “It is not even necessary for that person to have attracted us, up till then, more than or even as much as others. All that was needed was that our predilection should become exclusive. And that condition is fulfilled when – in this moment of deprivation – the quest for the pleasures we enjoyed in his or her company is suddenly replaced by an anxious, torturing need, whose object is the person alone, an absurd, irrational need which the laws of this world make it impossible to satisfy and difficult to assuage – the insensate agonizing need to possess exclusively.” Proust, Marcel. *In Search of Lost Time*, p.277.

<sup>10</sup> “Another woman was stroking his cheek, as soft as this silk, as warm and gentle as this pull-over – that I cannot bear... Between them there is an intimacy that used to belong only to me... My heart is being sawn in two with a very fine-toothed saw.” Simone De Beauvoir, *The Woman Destroyed*, 122-123.

<sup>11</sup> Seigworth and Gregg, 1.

different orders”<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, my discussion of jealousy is not just concerned with feelings but deals with how people think and talk about jealousy. Affect, again by contrast, can never be put into words or thought about because, according to these authors, it is precisely that which *escapes* consciousness and discursive communication. Massumi states that affect has nothing to do with consciousness or discourse. Referring to the autonomic nervous system (which automatically governs processes like heart rate, respiration, and skin conductance), he insists on the “irreducibly bodily and autonomic nature of affect”.

Furthermore, these “affective turn” writers often present themselves as being *against* a form of social science that analyses how discursive practices “construct” versions of reality. Patricia Clough, for example, presents her work and that of her colleagues as being all about “toppling ... semiotic chains of signification and identity and linguistic-based structures of meaning making” from their “privileged position”.<sup>13</sup> The affective turn, for Clough, Massumi, Seigworth, Gregg and numerous other influential North American scholars, is precisely a turn *against* what is sometimes called the “discursive turn” (i.e. the turn toward social constructionism) that preceded it. From this perspective, my approach (for part of my research I did indeed analyse discourse from transcribed interviews) is precisely what the affective turn is against, and my subject matter (the emotion of jealousy) is precisely what must not be mistaken for the true gold of affect.

The affective turn, as is becoming more apparent, is not just a fascination with an apparently new subject matter (“affect”), but is part of a much broader mutation in knowledge and knowledge practices. It is “a new understanding of human being and a new

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<sup>12</sup> Brian Massumi, “The autonomy of affect,” *Cultural Critique*, 31(2): 83-109, 1995, 88.

<sup>13</sup> Patricia Clough, “The affective turn: political economy, biomedica and bodies,” in Gregg & Seigworth, 223.

politics of the living”<sup>14</sup> or even “the overarching project of rethinking the human in the wake of a sustained critique of Western rationality”<sup>15</sup>. When the intellectual stakes are as grand as this, it is easy for little details to get passed over. It is easy for the affective turn to take the form of something closer to a cult movement or the movement of an artistic *avant-garde*. And it is easy for the term “affect” to serve as the buzzword or keystone for such a movement. But it must be said that in this respect, the term affect functions a little like the term “discourse” did, or does, amongst advocates of the discursive turn. Movements like social constructionism, post-modernism, post-structuralism and de-construction also presented themselves as part of a “rethinking of the human in the wake of a sustained critique of Western rationality”. The term “discourse” also carried, or carries, the excitement of a thrilling new breakthrough in thought, and functions as its symbol for the new collective that rallies around it. This symbolic and collective function can make the meaning of words like “discourse” and “affect” appear very vague and woolly indeed, as if something important might be lost were too much clarity to intrude. And it also enhances the tendency to simplify and parody the work of those who function as the “other” to the new truth of the *avant-garde*. But these dangers are especially evident with the term “affect”, since whatever affect is, it is “in essence beyond ordinary experience”<sup>16</sup>. The affective turn, we might say, stands up for those un-named and un-namable possibilities that must forever remain virtual. Affect is not... yet. Not quite.

I have suggested that my own interest in jealousy during the late 1980s and early 1990s expressed a more widespread interest in exploring emotions and psychological

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<sup>14</sup> Couze Venn, “Individuation, relationality, affect: rethinking the human in relation to the living,” *Body and Society*, 16(1): 129-161, 2010, 159.

<sup>15</sup> Anna Gibbs, “After affect: sympathy, synchrony, and mimetic communication,” in Gregg & Seigworth, 188.

<sup>16</sup> Steven Dexter Brown and Ian Tucker, “Eff the ineffable: affect, somatic management, and mental health service users,” in Gregg & Seigworth.

phenomena more generally as complex, relational, processual and multiple in nature, and as bound to changing cultural and historical circumstances. Around that time, this sort of critical reflection on psychology coalesced, for better or for worse, under the label of “social constructionism”.<sup>17</sup>

Having completed my PhD and having secured a full-time post in London as a University Lecturer, I was in a good position to keep a close eye on, and contribute to, what would become the “affective turn”, as it began in the mid 1990s. During that time, I created and taught (first at the University of East London and then at University College, London) a final year undergraduate course entitled “Affect in affective climate”, and I was particularly interested in the fact that scholars from many disciplines (here, the core disciplines were philosophy, cultural studies, sociology and queer theory) were becoming newly interested in the emotions. In the following section I wish to distinguish just three of the important tributaries that contributed towards influencing the affective turn, each of which operates with a rather different concept of affect. For the sake of simplicity I will concentrate on three publications that appeared in 1995.

### **1995 or “three key influences on the affective turn”**

*Affect as autonomous virtual intensity: Brian Massumi*

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann had famously called their treatise on the sociology of knowledge *The Social Construction of Reality* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966). This title caught on and in 1979 Jeff Coulter applied a variant of this sociology in an important book called *The Social Construction of Mind* (London: Palgrave, 1979). To my knowledge, the first psychology book bearing the phrase was Ken Gergen and Keith Davis *The Social Construction of the Person* (London: Springer Verlag, 1985), swiftly followed by Rom Harré’s edited volume *The Social Construction of Emotions* (London: Routledge, 1987). Celia Kitzinger, who completed her PhD at Reading shortly before my own published that work under the title *The Social Construction of Lesbianism* (London: Sage, 1987). My own PhD was an effort to lend some empirical substance to what was then a predominantly theoretical concern with the issues recently opened up by the thesis of the social construction of emotions.

The first publication I will discuss is Massumi's highly creative but somewhat chaotic article entitled *The Autonomy of Affect*.<sup>18</sup> Massumi is a philosopher with an interest in cultural studies. He drew heavily and partially upon Deleuze's readings of Bergson and Spinoza to critique the limitations of discursive approaches and to champion affect for what he called its autonomy from discourse. As he put it in a later publication, his project was an effort to "part company with the linguistic model at the basis of the most widespread concepts of coding"<sup>19</sup>. By the autonomy of affect Massumi really means its openness and hence its potential for novelty and disruption, but he also plays with autonomy as a political concept and, as we shall see, as a concept pertaining to the autonomic nervous system.

Using one of Bergson's favorite distinctions, Massumi defines affect as something virtual as distinct from something actual. This distinction is quite abstract, but in essence very simple: the virtual is an undifferentiated potential whose openness is necessarily closed down as soon as it is actualized as some concrete occurrence or entity. Although it quickly becomes highly complex, to give a simplified example, as you enter the cinema you might see any number of the films that are on offer: but when it comes to it you must choose one and forsake the others (and even if you opt to drop into several films for five minutes only, or to sit outside instead, it is *that* which you actualize, and not your other options). The actual is thus always a limitation or reduction or subtraction with respect to the buzzing possibilities of the virtual which, as it were, hover around any given actual. Massumi extends this distinction to the dimension of feeling. He defines "emotion" as something "actual" and thus as necessarily something that is more limited and concrete than "affect", defined as virtual. By

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<sup>18</sup> Brian Massumi, "The autonomy of affect," *Cultural Critique*, 31(2) : 83-109, 1995.

<sup>19</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the virtual: movement, affect, sensation*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 4.

reason of its virtuality, affect, as Massumi puts it, “escapes confinement”<sup>20</sup>. On this basis, Massumi insists that affect and emotion belong to distinct registers which must not be confused, the former being an open, autonomous, virtual “intensity” which escapes the confinements of structured, conscious meaning (which he calls “quality”) that, for him, characterizes emotion (these terms will be clarified below).

Massumi thus equates affect with intensity, and contrasts it with what he calls quality, which he identifies with emotion. In a densely complex and controversial argument, “quality” and “intensity” are presented as two distinct systems which operate in parallel. Taking the example of an image of a snowman, “quality” is identified with a “signifying order” which indexes the experience of the image to conventionally accepted and shared meanings (e.g. “this is a snowman”). The “intensity” of the image, on the other hand, is identified by Massumi with the strength and duration of its effects (and in particular, the effects the image has upon the electrodermal activity of a person’s skin). For Massumi, intensity and quality are always co-present in any given situation, but follow different logics and come in different mixtures, the latter perpetually capturing the former, but never quite succeeding, since intensity always escapes its fate of being fixed by qualities.

Emotion (as quality) is thus defined by Massumi in relation to the capture and taming of affect (as intensity), and is associated with the higher order processes of meaning-making, consciousness and communication that are often grasped with concepts of discourse (and semiosis more generally). Affect, in turn, is defined as an unstructured, unassimilable remainder, associated with the virtual potentialities of the autonomic nervous system, and with an asubjective and pre-personal connective logic that operates outside of consciousness and beyond the normativities of social order. Affect, in short, escapes articulation in discourse. In this way, Massumi is able to observe that approaches which take discourse as

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<sup>20</sup> Massumi, 1995, 228.

their keynote tend to be concerned only with “quality” at the expense of “intensity”, and yet, of the two, intensity is arguably the vital factor and the unacknowledged source of novelty.

Massumi’s work is thus understandable as a prolonged critique of what he sees as an endemic neglect of intensity / affect, and a plea for its decisive relevance for any understanding of the emergence of *novelty* in evolving systems of all kinds.

To make proper sense of this argument it is necessary to dissect it in some detail and to relate it to some of psychological theory that he borrows and adapts. Massumi’s 1995 article begins with a fascinating but highly selective and at times misguided interpretation of a series of quite conventional social psychological experiments. The experiments were led by the German psychologist Hertha Sturm to investigate how psychological reactions to film can be modified by voice-overs with different characteristics. Sturm became interested in a short film shown on German TV that had excited some attention from parents because some of their children had reported being disturbed by the film. Sturm wanted to know what it was about the film that made it so disturbing to these children. The film shows a snowman melting on the roof garden of the man who built it. The man watches and then takes it to the mountain where it can stay intact longer, and bids it farewell. The experiment involved modifying certain aspects of the film. It involved showing this film to children under three conditions: the original film (which involved no dialogue), a “factual” condition (in which a voice-over was added, giving factual statements about the action) and an “emotional” condition (in which the voice-over articulated and expressed the emotional feel of the action).

In each condition, the children who watched were asked to a) rate the film on a “pleasant-unpleasant” scale, and b) on a “happy-sad” scale, and they were also tested c) on their memory of the film whilst d) a number of physiological measures were taken (heart-rate, breathing and electrodermal activity). The basic idea, then, was to manipulate the independent variables (the three conditions in which the film was presented) and to examine

the effects this has on the dependent variables (a, b, c & d). On average, memory was best for the emotional version and worst for the factual version, and pleasantness was highest for the original wordless version and lowest for the factual version. Massumi claims to find this “a bit muddling”, and unravels an elaborate theory to explain his muddle. However, it seems to me that there is reason to question this sense of muddle, and hence the need to explain it.

First, it seems obvious that a film designed to be impactful without words would be enjoyed more in exactly that form (i.e., that the original format would be judged more pleasant). It seems equally obvious that superimposing a dull factual narrative would both spoil it for the children and, for this very reason, make it less memorable (explaining why the “factual” format was found least pleasant and least memorable). Also, it seems perfectly logical that adding the “emotional” narrative would enhance memory on a test that requires the child to recall using language (since they have been given some workable language for this as part of the film in this condition), and might not spoil the film quite as much as the factual voiceover (thus explaining why the “emotional” format might be more pleasant than the factual, but less pleasant than the original format, whilst being more memorable than both).

Be that as it may, Massumi describes these results as if they were highly counter-intuitive. He then identifies a further “surprise”: generally speaking, those scenes in the film that were rated most pleasant on the pleasant/unpleasant scale were also rated most sad on the “happy/sad” scale. It is in order to explain this finding – and also some physiological findings noted below - that Massumi elaborates his complex network of theoretical distinctions starting with content/effect and moving onto quality/intensity, mutating into “redundancy of signification”/“redundancy of resonance” and culminating in the “emotion/affect” distinction that, for many, would come to define the field of affect studies. Again, however, it seems quite obvious that when people (children and adults alike) view a sad film, the bits that are

likely to be most enjoyed (and hence rated as more “pleasant”) are precisely the sad bits, just as the best bits of a horror movie are the scenes that are scary. If we are disappointed by tear-jerkers that fail to jerk tears and by horror movies that fail to scare, then there is plenty of scope for describing a film enjoyable for its sadness as simultaneously sad and pleasant. This finding is only “strange” if it is assumed that the children cannot enjoy the sadness they feel when watching a film. Indeed, it is this assumption that seems strange to me, and not the idea that the participants might have used the “pleasantness” scale to indicate their enjoyment. If we don’t make this assumption there is no problem left for Massumi’s complex chain of conjectures to explain.

Nevertheless, Massumi goes on to “explain” this alleged “crossing of semantic wires”<sup>21</sup> (pleasantness = sadness) by making use of another perfectly understandable result that he finds confusing: namely that heart-rate and breathing depth were highest in the factual condition, whilst electrodermal activity (skin-conductance) was highest in the original version. He presents this, rather dramatically, in terms of the children being “physiologically split: factuality made their heart beat faster and deepened their breathing, but it made their skin resistance fall. The original nonverbal version elicited the greatest response from their skin. Galvanic skin response measures *autonomic* reaction”<sup>22</sup>. Of course all three are in fact measures of autonomic reaction, and all three are measures of intensity (since intensity is effectively the strength or concentration of a process, a faster heart rate is more intense than a slower one, for example).

Again, this notion of participants being “physiologically split” is a highly problematic inference. In fact, many years of studying the relationships between these measures of autonomic nervous system activity have shown remarkably variable correlations between

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<sup>21</sup> Massumi, 85.

<sup>22</sup> Massumi, 84.

measures of heart-rate, breathing-rate, skin-conductance, and so on. In a classic article, Taylor and Epstein warned against assuming homogeneity<sup>23</sup>. To give just one example, they reported high correlations (+.65) between heart rate and skin conductance amongst experienced parachutists undertaking a jump, but correlations closer to zero (and sometimes negative) for novices. The notion of being “physiologically split”, in short, presupposes a general coherence or homogeneity between these physiological measures that ought not to have been assumed. Indeed, these sorts of findings led most psychologists to abandon the concept of a measure of general arousal<sup>24</sup>. Abandoning general arousal called into question the simple distinction between a non-specific arousal component of motivation (typically called intensity) and an evaluational component which specifies motivational direction and content. It was this over-simplified distinction, for example, that had animated Schachter & Singer’s famous two-factor theory of emotions with its crude double act of the undifferentiated energy of autonomic physiological arousal and the informational business of cognition. For these authors, “emotion” is always a combination of the two factors of intensity provided by undifferentiated autonomic arousal, and cognition which qualifies and differentiates that arousal, taking psychosocial variables into consideration. Their famous experiments tried, largely unsuccessfully, to show that the same intensity of arousal (produced by injecting participants with adrenalin), could be ingredient in either anger or joy emotional experiences depending upon the manner in which the cognitive system qualified that artificially induced intensity with a meaning and direction. Tomkins wryly notes that the

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<sup>23</sup> Stuart P Taylor and Seymour Epstein, “The measurement of autonomic arousal: some basic issues illustrated by the covariation of heart rate and skin conductance,” *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 29(5): 514-525, 1967.

<sup>24</sup> G Robert J Hockey, Michael G H Coles and Anthony W K Gaillard, *Energetics and Human Information Processing* (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers: Dordrecht, 1986).

Schachter and Singer experiments became classics because they satisfied two conditions: they need to be believed and they are not read<sup>25</sup>.

Through his surprise at the lack of correlation between heart rate and electrodermal activity, Massumi perpetuates this now long outdated assumption of an homogenous arousal system supplying intensity. Furthermore, on the basis of his surprise he proceeds to finesse the situation by speculating that intensity “is embodied in purely autonomic reactions most directly manifested in the skin-at the surface of the body” whilst “[d]eep reactions belong more to the form/content (qualification) level, even though they also involve autonomic functions such as heartbeat and breathing”<sup>26</sup>. As well as being unsubstantiated, this distinction clearly compromises the integrity of Massumi’s “intensity/quality” distinction and his troublesome identification of affect with autonomic arousal. Based on the idea that of the three ANS measures used electrodermal activity is perhaps the least accessible to conscious control, he is arbitrarily limiting the meaning of “intensity” to electrodermal activity. This gives him the illusion of having identified a pure form of intensity that is uncontaminated by “quality”. He wants us to believe that the original version of the film had a pure and direct influence on the children’s skin conductance, whilst the factual version impacted heart rate and breathing indirectly via the mediation of conscious meaning (this is not to deny the findings, nor indeed that the skin may have a special motivational significance for feelings and may have been a better indicator of enjoyment in Sturm’s study). He further wants us to believe that this direct relationship between image and skin involves a paradoxical logic for which, miraculously, sadness can be pleasant, because no semantic or semiotic “ordering” (no “content” or “quality”) can be at play. I hope my criticism has made clear that:

a) there is no need for an elaborate explanation for why sadness can be pleasant,

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<sup>25</sup> Silvan S Tomkins, “The quest for primary motives: biography and autobiography of an idea,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 41(2): 306-329.

<sup>26</sup> Massumi, 85.

- b) there is no reason to be surprised at the lack of correlation between heart rate, breathing and skin conductance,
- c) electrodermal activity is not a pure form of autonomic intensity,
- d) there is no basis for identifying affect with this purified notion of intensity,
- e) emotion should not be identified, as did Schachter and Singer, with qualified general arousal, especially given the problematic nature of the latter concept.

Nevertheless, having extracted his idiosyncratic concept of affect, Massumi goes on to give it a distinctively political relevance, arguing that it “holds a key to rethinking postmodern power after ideology”. He famously discussed Ronald Reagan’s political appeal in terms of his transmission of affective potentials that were circulated by the mass media and then actualized as qualified contents by those at the receiving end. In this way, Massumi argues – or rather asserts - that Reagan was able to “produce ideological [i.e. discursive] effects by non-ideological [i.e. affective] means”<sup>27</sup>. Reagan’s mesmeric voice, for instance, can be thought of as transmitting affective potentials that many TV viewers actualized as an emotion of confidence. The suggestion is that Reagan’s political appeal was less about the content of his policies and the meaning of his statements, and more about the affective intensity and atmosphere he was able to generate within a mediatized system. Now it is certainly true that persuasive communication draws upon far more than rational argumentation to create its effects, and that figures like Reagan exploited this as much as they were able. It is also true that contemporary social systems of control rely heavily upon the subtle manipulation and modulation of feelings using open-ended, free-floating, networked and ultra-rapid modes of technology. Where old forms of discipline barked discursively organized orders to a massified and pacified cohort, contemporary control is more about the continual stimulation and modulation of feelings and desires. But none of this justifies or

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<sup>27</sup> Massumi, 102.

clarifies the idea that Reagan's appeal was about intensity/affect as distinct from quality/emotion.

Even on its own terms, Massumi's account is thoroughly contradictory. He happily moves from announcing his clearest lesson "that emotion and affect ... follow different logics and pertain to different orders"<sup>28</sup> to, just a few pages later, asserting that "What is being termed affect in this essay is precisely this two-sidedness, the simultaneous participation of the virtual in the actual and the actual in the virtual, as one arises from and returns to the other"<sup>29</sup>. If affect belongs to a virtual order that is fundamentally different to the actual order of emotion, then surely it cannot, without evident inconsistency, also fundamentally belong to both of these orders, linking them in a two-sided way.

*Affect as biological equipment for drive amplification: Sedgwick and Frank's appreciation of Silvan Tomkins*

The second publication from 1995 was an article called "Shame in the cybernetic fold," written by the famous queer theorist Eve Sedgwick and her collaborator, Adam Frank. This article shares with Massumi's a) a critical attitude towards the social constructionism of the discursive turn, and b) the feature of critiquing discursive approaches by way of an engagement with experimental social psychology. It begins with a scathing attack on the assumptions of critical discursive theory. The three most significant of these assumptions are, first, that theories grounded in biology are necessarily conservative, second, that human language provides the best model for understanding representation and, third, that dualisms of all kinds must be endlessly deconstructed<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Massumi, 88.

<sup>29</sup> Massumi, 96.

<sup>30</sup> Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, "Shame in the cybernetic fold: reading Silvan Tomkins," *Critical Inquiry*, 21 (2): 496-505, 1995.

To challenge these assumptions, Sedgwick and Frank championed the theory of affect proposed by the US psychologist Silvan Tomkins. During the time I was working on my PhD thesis, Tomkins' work was little known and very rarely discussed. I had encountered it as a precursor to the work on universal facial expressions of emotion undertaken by Paul Ekman. In part at least, Tomkins' lack of impact within psychology was attributable to the fact that his work was unusually "philosophical" in nature, although he engaged deeply with the existing biological and psychological literature. Indeed, he had studied philosophy at Harvard in the 1930s (A.N. Whitehead was one of his philosophical influences). Tomkins' main contribution was his four-volume work *Affect Imagery Consciousness*, which was published between 1962 and 1991. He argued consistently and at length for the existence of a small number of basic biologically hard-wired affects. Each of these affects varied in intensity, and so Tomkins included a low intensity version (e.g. fear) and a high intensity version (e.g. terror). The complete set includes distress/anguish, shame/humiliation, fear/terror, anger/rage, interest/excitement, enjoyment/joy, surprise/startle, disgust and dismissal.

Tomkins theorized what he called "the affect system" as effectively an amplifier of drive signals. The drive system, for Tomkins, is the motivational system - shared in common with many animals - that ensures our organic sustainability. Put simply, we seek water thanks to the drive signal we call "thirst", we eat thanks to a hunger drive and we reproduce thanks to a sex drive. Tomkins reasoned that an affect system had evolved to supplement the drive system, because the drive system alone had proved insufficiently motivating. Like drives, affects function by using organic processes to generate "signals" which, when experienced by the organism, motivate it to action. But whereas drive signals tend to specify the when, where and the how of the required action, affect signals motivate in a more general and diffuse manner. Hunger, for instance, is always about food and about getting it into one's belly via

the mouth, but anger can be “about” many things, and the actions taken to assuage it can be several in nature. The sex drive inclines one towards a concern with sex, but thanks to the affect of interest, a creature can be curious and seek out all kinds of possibilities. The affect system thus introduces a much richer and more varied realm of potential values into the life of an organism.

For Tomkins, each affect is hypothesized to be triggered by an innate activating mechanism and to find its primary instantiation in the face. Indeed, although each affect has multiple physical aspects (characteristic body-postures, particular patterns of ANS activity, specific vocalizations, etc.), Tomkins’ main criterion for the existence of an affect is the demonstrable existence of a unique facial expression (the smile of joy, the snarl of anger, the blush of shame, and so forth). Furthermore, the motivating affect signal that is experienced is quite literally *the feeling of the face* (along with the other relevant organic processes). It is these feelings that qualify the world we encounter with the felt tinge of value (a situation becomes exciting or scary or shameful, etc.). For Tomkins, the world can take on these values only thanks to affects which, in his theory, are triggered by patterns of neural stimuli with different densities of neural firing (the so called innate activating system). This means that it is not “the external world” that triggers affects, but differential patterns of neural firing (which may or may not be related to events in the “outside” world). In short, if neural stimulation is on the increase this triggers startle (if the increase is sharp and sudden) or fear (if it is less sudden) or interest (if it is gradual). Distress follows from a sharp increase that is sustained in time, and anger when the stimulation is more intense. Joy is triggered by the sudden reduction of stimulation. For example, if a sudden noise produces a sharp increase in density of neural firing in the hearer, then all else being equal, this would trigger surprise. But it would trigger distress if that high density continued, followed by anger if the volume were to increase, followed by joy if it were to stop. This theory (and it remains a theory) permits

any given affect to be triggered by any event, so long as that event produces the requisite alteration in density of neural firing.

So, in short, Tomkins' theory gives us: a) evidence for the existence of nine distinguishable affects; b) a theory of an innate trigger for each proposed affect; and c) a theoretical account of the motivational function of that affect system. Sedgwick and Frank, correctly in my view, saw this theory as a challenge to the prevalent dogma amongst social theorists that biology is necessarily essentialist and determining (since in Tomkins' account the innate system supplies the basis for value of any kind, and does not assume mechanistic determinism) and that discourse is the primary mode of representation (since affects provide meaning in a sense that can be prior to language). For me, it was remarkable to observe how rapidly Tomkins' work moved, in a matter of a couple of years, from relative obscurity to being "flavor of the month" amongst many cultural theorists and social scientists.

*Affect as largely unconscious psychic energy: Elliot and Frosh's psychosocialized Freud*

The third publication from 1995 was a volume edited by Elliott and Frosh entitled *Psychoanalysis in context*.<sup>31</sup> This text formed part of a resurgence of interest in, and reevaluation of, psychoanalytic theory and its application to sociological questions, that is now at the core of "psychosocial studies". Actually, I am using this book as a symbol for the awakening of interest in affect within psychoanalytical psychosocial studies. Dating from Freud's work, there has been much theorization of affect, wherein affect refers to the adventures of unconscious energy as it is "stored up" in the ego, "invested" in objects, and so forth. Only limited aspects of this dynamic process are consciously available to ordinary

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<sup>31</sup> Anthony Elliott and Stephen Frosh, eds., *Psychoanalysis in context: paths between theory and modern culture*, (London: Routledge, 1995).

people (e.g. as experiences of “anxiety”, “fear”, “anger”, “jealousy”, etc.). It is worth noting that Tomkins engaged in a sustained critique of Freud’s tendency to reduce the affects to modifications of basic drives (especially the sex drive), and indeed the old idea of drive energy (to which ideas become attached) still animates much psychoanalytic thought.

André Green, who is the main psychoanalytic authority on affect, points out that in France the adjective “affectif” and the verb “affecter” are part of everyday vocabulary, whilst in the UK the term “emotion” is typically preferred for talking about roughly the same thing, and “affective” has a more neutral ring. Freud himself used a mixture of terms including *Affekt*, *Gefühl* and *Empfindung* (each of which has been translated into English and French in multiple ways, including feeling, sentiment, emotion, affect, affection and sensation)<sup>32</sup>. Since, as a science and a clinical practice, psychoanalysis concerns the dynamic influence of what is not conscious (or at least, of feelings – often disturbing - that motivate us and yet cannot easily be put into words), then the ordinary terminology and lay theories are necessarily considered partial and distorted. What we consciously think of as our emotions (if we use that word) is revealed by the psychoanalyst to be something rather different, and so another term is arguably needed. In psychoanalytic therapy, for example, what the client may think of at one moment as love or hatred towards the analyst, is viewed by the analyst as something very different, with a different nature and origin (the so-called “transference”). Freud’s engagement with transference is important also because it extended the frame of the intelligible field of study of affectivity from the individual to the relationship between two people (the transference concerns the feelings a patient develops for their analyst). It is obvious that the transference cannot be understood by considering an individual alone.

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<sup>32</sup> André Green, “The conception of affect,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 58(2): 129-156, 1977.

Others, like Bion extended the intelligible field still further, considering the affectivity of group dynamics<sup>33</sup>.

It is also important to note that there is a great deal of variability both within the work of individual psychoanalytic thinkers, and between different thinkers. For Green, for example, the entire tradition of Lacanian psychoanalysis is basically Freud without the affect<sup>34</sup>. Since psychoanalysis is a clinical practice as well as a science, psychoanalysts are not purely concerned with an objective description and conceptualization of affect, but also with its experience and management or navigation. It is evidently easier to talk about what is said about affect than about affect itself. For psychoanalysts, affect challenges thought, and the question of the relationship between affect and discourse (or “representation”) becomes directly salient. Affect, from a psychoanalytic perspective, is intelligible and communicable only in so far as it is associated with a certain representation mediated by words, and typically the process of therapy is conceived as a way of rendering something like pure affect “graspable” and “digestible” by thought<sup>35</sup>.

Whilst *Psychoanalysis in context* was not specifically about emotion or affect, it began with a critical recognition that Freud’s practice functioned to colonize “otherness” and to “make it amenable to the demands of rationality”<sup>36</sup>, and it reflects critically upon this “imperialism” in ways which mirror Massumi and Sedgwick and Frank. The book expresses the new “psychosocial” interest in the affective and unconscious basis of creativity and social life that would become a key theme within the affective turn. Furthermore, the ambivalent relation the psychosocial tradition has to the discursive turn is summed up in Ian Craib’s

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<sup>33</sup> Wilfred R Bion, *Experiences in groups and other papers*, (London: Tavistock, 1961), 14.

<sup>34</sup> André Green, *The fabric of affect in the psychoanalytic discourse*, (London: Routledge, 1999), xv.

<sup>35</sup> See Matte Blanco, *Thinking, feeling and being*, (London: Routledge, 1988).

<sup>36</sup> Elliot and Frosh, 2.

description of social constructionism as a mass manic psychosis<sup>37</sup>.

### **The affective turn and the separation of affect and emotion**

The earliest use of the phrase “affective turn” that I have come across was by Anu Koivunen in 2001. She used it as the title of her preface to the published proceedings of a feminist conference to mark a renewed interest in “affects, emotions and embodied experiences” in many disciplines<sup>38</sup>. Note that Koivunen does not use the word “affective” to contrast with emotion, but includes “affects, emotions and embodied experiences” in the same broad category of the “affective”. Koivunen thus used “affective turn” to refer to a broad-based increase of interest amongst social scientists in emotional themes. We might just as well call it an “emotional turn”. Much of the work included in fact adopts a broadly social constructionist or post-structuralist theoretical framework and in this sense is part of the discursive turn. In other words, it rebels against the idea that emotion is a basic biological force contrasted with reason and proper to the natural sciences<sup>39</sup>.

To avoid confusion, I suggest that we reserve the phrase “affective turn” for the later development that I have been tracing above and that was indeed predicated upon a sharp distinction between affect and emotion. The phrase made its first appearance in the title of a book in 2007 thanks to Patricia Clough and Jean Halley<sup>40</sup>. Where Koivunen used affect as a

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<sup>37</sup> Ian Craib, “Social constructionism as a social psychosis,” *Sociology*, 31(1): 1-15, 1997. Craib suggests that social constructionists suffer from a delusion (that the world is constructed) which functions to defend them from a confrontation with their powerlessness to explain that world. They imagine they are lucid and rational, but all the while their thinking is shaped and determined by the affect.

<sup>38</sup> Anu Koivunen, “The Affective Turn? Preface to the Proceedings of the Conference *Affective encounters: rethinking embodiment in feminist media studies*”, 2001.

<sup>39</sup> It is not coincidental that feminism was a significant influence since feminists were amongst the first to point out the masculinist bias at play in the old Platonic, Augustinian, Cartesian and Kantian dogma whereby reason must assert itself as (transcendent) “master” over the (natural) passions and sentiments.

<sup>40</sup> Patricia Clough and Jean Halley, eds., *The Affective Turn: theorizing the social* (London: Duke University Press, 2007).

generic turn, Clough and Halley use it in a sense that is both more limited and more ambitious. For Clough affect designates the quite specific avant-garde intellectual movement—mostly located within the humanities—that turns against the post-modern, deconstructionist, or discursive turn usually associated with social constructionism by turning to a concept of affect that is sharply distinguished from emotion. In this sense it builds upon the criticisms of “discourse” that appeared in the three tributaries discussed above.

Affect, in this sense, is not only strictly separated from discursive practices but is defined as being in principle inaccessible to discursive articulation. It is an autonomous and pre-personal force or capacity that precedes, or perhaps exceeds, consciousness. The starting point for this affective turn, as we have seen, is the idea that the discursive turn led to a monopoly of concern with discursive processes and to the neglect of a vast and vital territory of affective dynamics and forces. If for advocates of the discursive turn, discourse symbolized a principle of progressive freedom from naturalistic essentialism, then for advocates of the affective turn discourse symbolized, on the contrary, a certain entrapment within a spider’s web of meaning better grasped as discursive imperialism. The key, from this perspective, is to articulate an ontology capable of recognizing “the virtual”, and granting it a reality, even if that reality is, by definition, not actual: “one of the surest things that can be said of affect and its theorization is that they will exceed, always exceed the context of their emergence, as the excess of ongoing process”<sup>41</sup>. Again, it is this sense of the “virtual” which always exceeds the “actual” that informs the firm affect/emotion distinction: “affect is... vital forces insisting beyond emotion”<sup>42</sup> or “affect is... synonymous with *force*”, or “affect can be understood then as a gradient of bodily capacity”<sup>43</sup>. In this respect, it is Massumi’s work that has exerted the greatest influence on the affective turn, where affect stands for the “virtual as

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<sup>41</sup> Seigworth and Gregg, 5.

<sup>42</sup> Op cit, 1.

<sup>43</sup> Op cit, 2.

cresting in a liminal realm of emergence” that is “not directly accessible to experience”<sup>44</sup>. I have already presented a criticism of the way in which Massumi crafts a concept of affect as pure intensity. I will now criticize the way in which he justifies this distinction by recourse to the philosophy of Spinoza.

Massumi describes Spinoza as being “a formidable philosophical precursor on many of these points: on the difference in nature between affect and emotion, on the irreducibly bodily and autonomic nature of affect...” It seems to me, however, that Spinoza does not distinguish between affect and emotion and does not argue for the irreducibly autonomic nature of the former. Here I will address just the first point<sup>45</sup>. Spinoza wrote in Latin and used the term *affectus* (as well as the variants *afficio* and *affectio*), and to my knowledge he never used the word emotion, which was barely used until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (though in many English translations of his work, *affectus* is often translated as “emotion”). For Spinoza, the affections of a body are the modifications that occur in the course of an encounter with another body. Spinoza discusses the affects at great length in his most famous book, the *Ethics*<sup>46</sup>. When Spinoza deals with concrete examples of affects, far from marking a difference in nature from emotion, he discusses what we would now call emotions. That is to say, he discusses experiences called things like anger, fear, joy, jealousy, envy and so forth.

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<sup>44</sup> Massumi, 1995, 92.

<sup>45</sup> The second claim made by Massumi is equally false, since Spinoza nowhere argues for the “irreducibly bodily and autonomic nature of affect”. In the first place, as Massumi is well aware, Spinoza is most famous for what is called his thought/extension parallelism. This means that he resolutely refuses to separate mind/thought from body/extension and instead basis his entire philosophy upon the argument that these are not two separate substances, but one substance which can be made to show up to an observer under two different attributes. There is no “irreducibly bodily” event for Spinoza, since each and every event can be considered under at least the two attributes “thought” and “extension”. For a more detailed account, see Paul Stenner, *Liminality and Experience: A transdisciplinary approach to the psychosocial*, (London: Palgrave, 2018).

<sup>46</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics: including the improvement of the understanding*. (Trans. R.H.M. Elwes, New York: Prometheus books, 1677/1989).

The important thing is his *approach* to these emotions, which always emphasizes modifications wrought by encounters. Anger, for Spinoza, is thus a particular kind of modification that occurs in particular types of encounters.

It is important, however, to understand that Spinoza does not limit his understanding of affects to human emotions. On the contrary, as a philosopher Spinoza is looking for much broader generality. Here we find a real basis for a distinction between affect (as applicable ontologically) and emotion (the specifically anthropological manifestation of affects), albeit one Spinoza does not make using those terms. For him, *all* entities are to be understood in relation to the affects they are capable of in their encounters with other entities. His philosophy is thoroughly relational in that anything that exists does so as a function of its relations, and hence of the affects it is capable of going through. All finite entities in nature are affected/modified by other entities in nature. This is also the relational basis for a process philosophy because it starts with, and foregrounds, the idea that affect is a reciprocal process of affecting and being affected. When it comes to human beings, those affects often take the form of emotions (but not exclusively, since feelings of hunger, sensations of touch, etc. are not emotions in the modern sense).

Importantly, the distinction I have just described is not the one Massumi draws, but rather the difference between a concept applied in a maximally general and ontological way (we might even use the scary word “metaphysical”), and a concept applied in a specific, and in this case specifically *anthropological*, way (pertaining to human beings). Since the bodies of both are modified in the process of their encounters, the ontological concept of *affectus* applies equally to snails and to people, but this does not mean that the experiences of snails and people are the same. A snail is not capable of being affected and of affecting others in the manner that we call “envy” and, perhaps in some respects, we humans are not capable of being affected in the manner of a snail. We sometimes give the name “emotions” to these

specific human affects (i.e. to affects at the specifically anthropological level), and we might need another name for the specifics of the snail's affections. From Spinoza's perspective, both specific sets could quite properly be called—using the more general category—affects: “The things we have shown so far are completely general and do not pertain more to man than to other individuals, all of which, though in different degrees, are nevertheless animate.”<sup>47</sup>

Something similar can be said about the affect/emotion distinction as it pertains to the second and third streams of influence described above. Tomkins himself did not draw the distinction between affect and emotion that is now routinely assumed amongst scholars of the affective turn. Like Spinoza, when Tomkins discusses the affects that make up the affect system, he refers to what ordinary people would call emotions: the experiences we call anger, fear, shame, disgust, joy and so forth. In his published work, Tomkins uses the word “emotion” very rarely, and the reason that he prefers the word “affect” is that he wanted a more scientific sounding word that would allow him and his readers to step back from routine and common-sense assumptions about emotions (although some interpreters of his work use the word “emotions” to denote complex blends of experience involving scripts). In short, what ordinary so-called “lay folk” call their “emotions”, the scientist – with the benefit of their objective research—recognizes as proper to an innate system of affects. A very similar use of the term “affect” is made by Panksepp in the research programme he calls “affective neuroscience”<sup>48</sup>. Likewise, within the psychoanalytical tradition, Green (1999) takes the position that affect should be a metapsychological term and not a descriptive term with a specific referent. The word “affect” should thus be reserved for use as a categorical term

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<sup>47</sup> Spinoza, 89 (13<sup>th</sup> proposition of Part 2).

<sup>48</sup> Jaak Panksepp, *Affective Neuroscience: The foundations of human and animal emotions*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998).

which groups together “all the nuances that German (Empfindung, Gefühl) or French (émotion, sentiment, passion etc) bring to this category” (1999, p. ü8).

## **Conclusion**

If my analysis is correct, then the affective turn—so long as it is based on something like Massumi’s affect/emotion distinction—turns on flimsy ground indeed. In questioning the separation of affect and emotion within the literature of the affective turn my intention is not to insist that there is no value in, for example, a distinction between the virtual and the actual, or in attending to affective experiences that are vaguely felt or felt only as “atmospheres”, or in exploring unconscious forces, or impulses that are shared with other animals. On the contrary, these things are certainly worth attending to. My concern, rather, has been with an unfortunate tendency to polarize affect and emotion and to arbitrarily assign emotion to conditions which are conscious, personal and tied to clear socially available meanings. Emotions are never clearly personal and it is likely that they always involve unconscious phases and typically implicate electrodermal activity and other autonomic responses. In my view, the affective turn should be considered, not as a rejection, but as a deepening of the discursive turn and as a continuation of the important project of a new understanding of human being in the wake of a sustained critique of Western rationality. That project must necessarily involve a sustained engagement with the affective dimensions of experience, conduct and communication, and it must, in my view, transgress the usual boundaries between the natural sciences, the social sciences and the humanities.

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