

ONE

Introducing affect: Lines of argument

Affect (1)

vb [...] (tr)

1. to act upon or influence, esp in an adverse way *damp affected the spark plugs*
2. to move or disturb emotionally or mentally *her death affected him greatly*
3. (Medicine) (of pain, disease, etc.) to attack

n [...]

(Psychology) *Psychol* the emotion associated with an idea or set of ideas. See also affection

[from Latin *affectus*, past participle of *afficere* to act upon, from *ad-* to + *facere* to do]

Affect (2)

vb (mainly tr)

1. to put on an appearance or show of; make a pretence of *to affect ignorance*
2. to imitate or assume, esp pretentiously *to affect an accent*
3. to have or use by preference *she always affects funereal clothing*
4. to adopt the character, manner, etc., of *he was always affecting the politician*
5. (Life Sciences & Allied Applications / Biology) (of plants or animals) to live or grow in *penguins affect an Arctic climate*
6. to incline naturally or habitually towards *falling drops of liquid affect roundness*

[from Latin *affectare* to strive after, pretend to have; related to *afficere* to AFFECT (1)]

(*Collins English Dictionary*, Sixth Edition, 2003)



In recent years there has been a huge surge of interest across the social sciences in the study of affect. What is 'affect', though? For a psychologist or neuroscientist, this is pretty much straightforward. Affective scientists (as they are now called) investigate emotional states and the distinctive perturbations they cause in the body and mind. Sometimes 'affect' includes every aspect of emotion and sometimes it refers just to physical disturbance and bodily activity (blushes, sobs, snarls, guffaws, levels of arousal and associated patterns of neural activity), as opposed to 'feelings' or more elaborated subjective experiences.

So far, so conventional – but the term 'affect' could also key into much more general modes of influence, movement and change. We could talk, for instance, about 'being affected' by an event, even if it is not quite clear what the impact is. Affect in this sense need not be confined to humans or even animate life – the sun affects the moon, a magnet affects iron filings, and the movement of waves affects the shape of the coastline. *Damp affects spark plugs* as the Collins Dictionary prosaically puts it. Affect now means something like a force or an active relation. The term loses its moorings in studies of human emotion and expands to signify disturbance and influence in their most global senses. Thus, for Felicity Coleman (2005, p. 11), 'affection is the intensity of colour in a sunset on a dry and cold autumn evening [...] affect is that audible, visual and tactile transformation produced in reaction to a certain situation, event or thing'. While, for Kathleen Stewart (2007, p. 1), affect is evident when '*something* throws itself together in a moment as an event and a sensation; a something both animated and inhabitable' (emphasis in the original).

We have, then, two alternative connotations – a familiar psychologised notion focused on 'the emotions' as these are usually understood, and also a 'wilder' more encompassing concept highlighting difference, process and force in more general terms. With these two contrasting meanings in play, what Clough and Halley (2007) describe as the new 'turn to affect' in social research could become quite a complex act. It could become very confusing.

For many social researchers, the new interest in affect is principally topic-based. It is about infusing social analysis with what could be called psychosocial 'texture'. The turn to affect is mainly a stimulus to expand the scope of social investigation. It leads to a focus on embodiment, to attempts to understand how people are moved, and what attracts them, to an emphasis on repetitions, pains and pleasures, feelings and memories. How do social formations grab people? How do roller coasters of contempt, patriotism, hate and euphoria power public scenes? The advantage of affect is that it brings the dramatic and the everyday back into social analysis. It draws attention to moments of resentment, kindness, grumpiness, ennui and feeling good, to the extremities of distress that can result from ill use, and to the intensities of ecstasy. Interest in affect opens up new thinking about nebulous and subtle emotions like *schadenfreude*, or mixed and ambivalent phenomena such as reluctant optimism, intense indifference, or enjoyable melancholy.

For others, however, the turn to affect involves more than adding emotion to the inventory of social research topics. It signifies a more extensive ontological





and epistemological upheaval, marking a moment of paradigm change. An interest in affect badges a particular theoretical attitude or standpoint supported particularly by the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, but also the philosophies of Baruch Spinoza, Alfred North Whitehead and Henri Bergson. In the hands of these proponents, the turn to affect becomes a decisive shift away from the current conventions of critical theory, away from research based on discourse and disembodied talk and texts, towards more vitalist, 'post human' and process-based perspectives. (Recent Special Issues of journals exploring this broad theme include Adkins and Lury, 2009; Ahmed, 2007/2008; Blackman and Cromby, 2007; Blackman and Venn, 2010; Davidson et al., 2008; and Fraser et al., 2005.) This focus on affect – generalised as the process of making a difference – slides over distinctions between human and non-human, animate and inanimate. Advocates are often intensely critical of previous research on discourse. Attention is thrown onto becoming, potential and the virtual (e.g. Massumi, 1996) in preference to the already formed objects that are the usual fare of social science (institutions, identities, economies, social classes, etc.).

A Way In

This book is driven by a desire to develop a pragmatic way of thinking about affect and emotion as a basis for social research, especially new empirical research. I will be arguing that neither of the two connotations of affect already in play, and the ways in which these have been taken up in social research, provides quite the right foundations. Conventional psychological research on emotions is too narrow and restrictive to support all the things social research could do in this area. Ordinary 'basic emotion' terms used by psychobiologists (sadness, anger, fear, surprise, disgust and happiness) do not adequately describe the range and variety of affective performances, affective scenes and affective events. But, although I will borrow fairly substantially from this general line of thinking, some dominant approaches applying Deleuzian inspired concepts of affect understood as force don't always work well either.

The conceptualising of affect as influence, intensity and impact is part of a broader philosophical project (see Patton, 2000, on Deleuze's notion of the aims of philosophy and the function of concepts). Translating this into the registers of social research requires care. Formulating a philosophy of force, becoming, potential, encounter and difference is a different enterprise from working out the most useful approaches for investigating specific affective phenomena and their consequences, such as the forms of liberal well-meaningness that infuse some white citizens' relations with indigenous people in settler societies, for instance, or the prevalence of feelings of victimhood in niches of contemporary political life, or understanding why emotions of 'righteous indignation' might maintain a status quo rather than undermine it. I will be arguing in Chapter 3 that, although Deleuzian concepts are valuable for thinking about process, some applications of





Deleuze and related philosophical traditions (e.g. Clough, 2008a; Massumi, 1996; Thrift, 2008a) have been radically unhelpful in their assertions about the functioning of affect, and in their disdain for previous work.

These various complications mean that the turn to affect in social research currently struggles to deliver a way of working that is consistently productive and generative. To decipher why this is so, and what might work better, I conducted a reading marathon across psychology and neuroscience, critical and social psychology, cultural studies, and the sociology of emotion, seeking to understand what was around, and what was available. Why does the new field of affect take the shape it does, and how might it be twisted and distorted by the past it reacts against?

I found myself drawn to some of the other connotations for affect the dictionary throws up, such as performance and pretence (*affecting the persona of the politician, affecting an accent*) and habit and character (*affecting roundness, affecting an Arctic climate*). I kept coming back to pattern and order, since these are comforting and familiar standbys in empirical research. I became interested in how the affective textures and activities of everyday life are shaped. A central aim was to develop a way of thinking and a line of argument that might flow from psychobiology through to social analysis. It took quite a bit of detective work to understand the blocks preventing this, leading to cul-de-sacs. Some of these initially seemed so serious as to scupper the whole enterprise, but with some navigating it did seem possible to put together integrated readings of the somatic, discursive, situated, historical, social, psychological and cultural bases of affective activity.

I settle in this account on the concept of *affective practice* as the most promising way forward. Practice has old and familiar connotations in the social sciences, and these are useful and still extremely valuable. But, practice is also capacious enough to extend to some of the new thinking available about activity, flow, assemblage and relationality and to follow translations of aspects of Deleuzian and other philosophical projects into social research. Practice conjures forms of order but recognises their 'could be otherwise' qualities (Edwards, 1997). Affective practice focuses on the emotional as it appears in social life and tries to follow what participants do. It finds shifting, flexible and often over-determined figurations rather than simple lines of causation, character types and neat emotion categories.

Despite the advantages of toppling sovereign human subjectivity, and expanding the range of social agents to include animate life and material objects, I have to confess that I am not really interested in non-human affect in this book. Research on affect in cultural studies (e.g. Thrift, 2008a) is often obfuscating when it elides together affect as topic (the study of emotion) with affect defined as becoming and intensity so that sunsets, iron filings, talking parrots, financial meltdowns, earthquakes, sobbing Englishmen, angry Libyans, etc., are studied under the same rubric. By affect, I will mean *embodied meaning-making*. Mostly, this will be something that could be understood as *human emotion*.

This first chapter introduces the field and the lines of argument I will be developing throughout the book. First, though, I want to look at three brief examples, sketching affect in action, presented with minimal commentary. These illustrate



the kind of phenomena I think the study of affect should pick out, why affect is interesting and important for social research, and why it is so incredibly difficult.

Frenzied bodies

14 July 1518 – Somewhere amid the narrow lanes, the congested wharves, the stables, workshops, forges and fairs of the medieval city of Strasbourg, Frau Troffea stepped outside and began to dance. So far as we can tell no music was playing and she showed no signs of joy as her skirts flew up around her rapidly moving legs. To the consternation of her husband, she went on dancing throughout the day. And, as the shadows lengthened and the sun set behind the city's half-timbered houses, it became clear that Frau Troffea simply could not stop. Only after many hours of crazed motion did she collapse from exhaustion. Bathed in sweat and with muscles twitching, she finally sank into a brief restorative sleep. Then, a few hours later, she resumed her solitary jig. Through much of the following day she went on, fatigue rendering her movements increasingly violent and erratic. (Waller, 2008, pp. 1–2)

In his book, *A Time to Dance and a Time to Die*, historian John Waller re-constructs Frau Troffea's frenzied jig as the first manifestation of the dancing plague that would spread through Strasbourg in 1518. The epidemic travelled rapidly and lasted throughout the summer. It was spooky, eerie and extreme in its effect. At its peak, hundreds of people succumbed, with perhaps as many as 15 dying each day. Waller states that similar plagues had occurred for several centuries previously (equivalent events had been recorded from 1017), but this late 16th century example seems to have been the second largest of Europe's dancing epidemics and is the best documented.

Waller describes how among the various possibilities for explaining what was going on, contemporary observers settled on the view that Frau Troffea, and those who followed her, were suffering from a visitation from St Vitus, who was punishing the people of Strasbourg. Frau Troffea's fellow citizens apparently briefly considered the possibility that she was rebelling against her husband, showing him up with an insubordinate display, or had been taken over by Satan or a demon. But, after much discussion, and as the plague spread, they concluded that this was a heavenly omen. Perhaps this interpretation was favoured because something practical could then be done. Sufferers were taken by cart to Saverne, to a grotto and chapel dedicated to St Vitus, to appease the Saint and to recover.

Over 500 years later, historians make sense of this event through very different theoretical apparatuses. For Waller, it becomes an example of mass suggestion understandable in the context of the times. He argues that Strasbourg's dancing plague was not so extraordinary viewed in the light of the contemporary 'environment of belief' and in light of the misery of the ordinary population in 1518. The dancing plague was preceded by severe famine, waves of sickness and disease, and unusual extreme cold. Waller describes the great anguish, distress and foreboding of the population, their loss of faith in the goodness of the clergy and their landlords, resulting in pervasive feelings of abandonment and uncertainty. While



they were suffering, their priests and landlords were well off. They had the spare capital to stockpile grain and other essential commodities and were selling them at hugely inflated prices.

Waller points out the investment of the citizens of Strasbourg in the idea of the supernatural. Everyday events were explicable in terms of the battle between God and the Devil, rendering people permeable to demons and spirits. He argues that Frau Troffea's actions, the dancing plague she set off, and the trance-like state the dancers seemed to enter, were a kind of hysterical manifestation. The epidemic was an over-determined symptom of the times. It was an act of muted rebellion expressing a huge dissatisfaction. This distress, Waller suggests, could be performed and assuaged only by turning suffering and anguish self-destructively against one's own body in forms of dance which in better times had been familiar ways of escape and pleasure.

It is not my intention with this illustration to set up the citizens of 16th century Strasbourg as poor benighted fools, although, inevitably, the dancing plague is a spectacle and the reader does become a judge and voyeur. I cite this example because in this case affect emerged as something enigmatic and difficult to interpret. The push of the body seemed particularly strong and intensely located in a nexus of relations. This did not appear, however, to be an example of emotion in any conventional sense – Frau Troffea's actions do not seem to fit any list of standard emotions in a psychology textbook. Yet something was felt. Bodies became organised and a situation was formulated, evaluated, negotiated and, crucially, communicated. It demonstrates why social researchers might want to expand the connotation of affect beyond the familiar emotion palettes.

Melancholic communities

At the end of the day, if you're coming over from another country, you've got to understand how our country works, do you know what I mean, so you know, you should respect and understand what our law ... you know what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. You can't come into another country and get everything handed to you on a plate. I'm sorry, I just don't agree with that.

There was a case about an Indian family staying in a hotel and they just kept paying for them. And I said to them, if I was black or wore a sari and had half a dozen kids, I said, you'd put me in a place right now. They said, that's not very nice, Mrs Butler. I said, 'no it isn't', but that happens to be true ... And I'm not prejudiced, but we should come first, we are British, we are born here.

... going up to Liverpool on a stag weekend that he's organised because he is a passionate Everton fan, he's a second generation Asian, but you just wouldn't know it because he is a Scouser, and he waves the flag for England for the cricket ... That's my kind of immigrant. If everybody was like that, there would be no problem, you know but they aren't. They want to have, they want to import somehow too much ...

... some census that they're doing and it had every nationality, every denominational (sic) mixture, anything that you could possibly think of except English.



And I just think, the Scots can be Scottish, the Welsh, you know, they're Welsh, but we have to be British. ... I had never bothered about it before, but I am bothering about it now.

(Extracts from Clarke et al., 2009, pp. 141–9)

These extracts come from interviews with white English citizens living in middle-class residential areas and working-class estates in Plymouth and Bristol in the South West of the UK. They were interviewed twice between January 2005 and May 2006 in a study conducted by Clarke, Garner and Gilmour, covering a range of topics including home and community, Britishness, immigration, the European Union and welfare policies. Clarke et al.'s work on this material (e.g. Clarke and Garner, 2009) has contributed to whiteness studies (Garner, 2007), and they have developed psychosocial analyses of how public identities and affiliations are mediated through personal histories (Clarke, 2009).

There is a kind of consistency here, not just in the type of arguments presented about 'proper behaviour' and 'fitting in' (what Clarke et al., 2009, call the 'when in Rome' trope repeated over and over) but also in the apparent feelings. Frau Troffea's affect was performed intensely and primarily physically, while in this example there seem to be more obvious kinds of 'affective–discursive loops' operating. The rhetoric and narratives of unfairness, loss and infringement create and intensify the emotion. Bile rises and this then reinforces the rhetorical and narrative trajectory. It goes round and round.

Because I disagree with the views expressed (and enjoy the privilege of safe distance), I can see it as like lifting the lid to reveal the squabbling siblings in family disputes arguing over who has got more than their fair share and who should rightfully come first. It might be funny if it wasn't so grave. Global political issues, multicultural futures, colonial history, immigration and national identity are being discussed. Yet what is fascinating is how we refract those conjunctions through domestic, ordinary, and wearing affective routines – through the well-worn and intimate practice of 'taking umbrage' and 'righteous indignation', intertwining with other practices such as the more poignant figurations that go with the sense of 'missing out', being a victim, and the discomfort of not having 'natural' claims recognised. Affect can be uncanny and extreme but it can also be ordinary (Stewart, 2007). Through this ordinary affect, people engage with the momentous and the global political.

In an insightful analysis of the UK situation, Paul Gilroy (2004) argues that much of white Britain is suffering from 'post-imperial melancholia'. He suggests there has been a failure to mourn the loss of imperial prestige and find new national narratives to refurbish now unconvincing and dated imaginings of plucky and stoical Britons winning World Wars and maps covered in pink territories. Britain is 'melancholic', for Gilroy, because it has not moved on as Freud suggested those grieving must do, and the country seems unable to refashion the nation for new actualities. Nostalgia and football chants such as 'two world wars and one world cup' fail to sustain. In a bizarre twist, some members of a nation that acted as the colonial oppressor have come to understand themselves



as the victims, claiming unfairness, infringement and lamenting in particular the loss of English identity.

Becoming the victim, as Gilroy notes, is currently a culturally precious and exalted position for which many compete (see also Berlant, 1997). As the extracts above indicate, it often depends on practical affective work to establish entitlement and rightful status, a sense of self as good and fair but abused, and an affective subject position as a warm, hospitable and powerful host whose generosity and largesse is extended to others who turn out to be ungrateful wretches. White British citizens are encouraged in these affective positions by some of their politicians. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair had this to say in a speech on extremism and 'the duty to integrate' given in December 2006 towards the end of his premiership:

[extremism] has thrown into sharp relief, the nature of what we have called, with approval, 'multicultural Britain'. We like our diversity. But how do we react when that 'difference' leads to separation and alienation from the values that define what we hold in common? For the first time in a generation there is an unease, an anxiety, even at points a resentment that our very openness, our willingness to welcome difference, our pride in being home to many cultures, is being used against us; abused, indeed, in order to harm us.

I always thought after 7/7 [the London terrorist bomb attacks] our first reaction would be very British: we stick together; but that our second reaction, in time, would also be very British: we're not going to be taken for a ride.

Blair is attempting here to construct, define and appeal to what Barbara Rosenwein (2006) calls an 'emotional community'. He seems very confident that he knows who his 'we' and 'us' are and what they might feel. And, interestingly, this act of constructive mobilisation is liable to invoke 'as if' replays of affect among those who can identify and position themselves as included. Pride can swell at 'our' great qualities. There is comfort in being part of a 'we' who stick together, but there is also anxiety rising at the possibility of being taken as a mug.

Bumping bodies

The final example comes from Maggie Turp (2001, p. 147–53) and is a case study from her psychotherapy practice. Her account of the client she calls 'Richard' is a moving one. Here are some of the basic details she sets up:

Richard was a man who came to see me at the age of 28, suffering from painful feelings of isolation and describing himself as depressed and beset by feelings of hopelessness. ...

A few sessions into our work together, Richard began to speak, with considerable embarrassment, about his behaviour in London underground stations. He told me very hesitantly that on every journey, he engineered a number of 'gentle bumps', small collisions with other passengers. These incidents took place in corridors and hallways that he traversed when changing trains on his journey to and from work.



I said that I could see it was difficult for him to speak about these matters, but that I thought they were important and that I would like to know more. Richard told me that his strategy was to almost avoid the person coming towards him, then at the last moment to make a very slight adjustment of direction and posture so that physical contact was made. It was important to him that the collision passed more or less unacknowledged. A 'successful bump' caused no pain to either party, and was not sufficiently significant to warrant an apology. Richard tried to manage six to ten such bumps on each journey. I asked Richard what he made of the situation he was describing, but he clearly had no idea what motivated his behaviour. (Turp, 2001, p. 147)

Turp describes in this case study what she calls, in a useful phrase, the 'body story line' Richard has put together. She argues that this pattern, presented as a symptom, is over-determined. It is a way of dealing with profound physical isolation and loneliness and of seeking some comfort. It is a method of controlling amounts of physical contact in ways that are manageable for Richard and on his own terms. It is deeply gendered also. And, later in the therapy, the 'gentle bumps' take on a hostile tinge as Richard comes to recognise what Turp describes as the impoverished and thin nature of his childhood and the lack of warmth received from his mother.

Richard's therapy with Maggie Turp becomes a form of affective re-training as he gradually disentangles his old practice. He comes to know it, formulate it and understand it as a particular kind of affective stand-in. He comes to inhabit what Despret (2004a, p. 209) describes as the moment of hesitation in emotion when it is possible to launch body and mind on new alternative trajectories and choose other forms of becoming. In this moment, body/mind is unlabelled potential – unscripted and undifferentiated. The old scripts, figurations, positions and narratives are always available waiting in the wings, but Turp's story has a good outcome. Richard is successful in his refiguring and develops new ways of being in relation with others.

The Challenge of Affect

The three examples just considered indicate how dominating bodies and feeling states often are – whether in the extremity of frenzy, the self-pity of melancholy, or the tacit life of underground encounters. They begin to suggest why new work on affect wants to introduce the energetic, the physical, and the sensual back into the social sciences, and why it might be important to do so. 'Rather than have to think, always and endlessly, what else there could be, we sometimes seem to connect with a layer in our existence that simply wants the things of the world close to our skins' (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 106, cited in Thrift, 2008a, p. 5).

There is a lot to be gained. Advocates argue that we can better understand the panicky rhythms of current politics and recurring waves of appeal to terror and security (Burkitt, 2005; Clough, 2008a; Massumi, 2005). Affect is central to new

forms of emotional labour and to responses to the precariousness of neo-liberal workplaces (Gill and Pratt, 2008; Hardt, 1999; Negri, 1999). In the field of identity studies, researchers are increasingly turning to analyses of feeling practices to better understand people's allegiances and investments, and the activities of categorising, narrating, othering, differentiating and positioning (see the chapters in Wetherell and Talpade Mohanty, 2010). Many have argued that affect is the key to building a halfway decent account of the unpredictable psychosocial actor, the ways in which she or he is suffused with feeling (Cromby, 2007a), and unconsciously connected (Baraitser and Frosh, 2007; Campbell, 2007).

Above all else, it is clear that coming to terms with affect implies coming to terms with the body. Social researchers are nervously dusting off their psychological knowledge and recalling scraps of biology, reading neuroscience texts and seizing on promising bits of popular science and psychoanalysis. How can the relays and ricochets of the human body be grasped, and the visceral put in touch with the social? It is an anxious business because the bridges between biology and social science, and between psychology (the main site of research on embodied affect) and the rest of the social sciences, are so fragile and shaky. It is also disquieting because most of us in social research want to approach this territory critically. We don't buy the realist and objectivist presumptions and the claims that with every investigation the biological sciences are moving closer and closer to discovering the truth. Psychology and biology are interesting as counter-narratives, formulating sometimes unfamiliar and generative 'ontoverses'. But there is so little time to think about it, enormous pressure to publish, and we can only get so far debating familiar meta-theory, epistemology and the philosophy.

Scholars have adopted a number of knowledge strategies. There is endless exhortation to pay attention to the physical and the visceral. But most of the actual attempts to do so have been half-hearted. Those who try to engage with research in the affective sciences often struggle to understand the significance, limits and implications of the striking findings attracting their attention. A number are candid that there is an immense amount of relevant material out there but they haven't yet come to terms with it (e.g. Thrift, 2004, p. 59). Some dismiss this work as 'positivistic', although others, such as the historian William Reddy (2001), take pains to sort out non-positivistic ways of thinking about recent developments in cognitive psychology and neuroscience. Reddy recognises the epistemological limitations but moves ahead anyway. A number of scholars (e.g. Brennan, 2004; Massumi, 1996) cherry-pick existing work on affect and the body in a relatively shameless way, rooting out a few interesting-looking studies from *Scientific American* or from circumscribed areas such as studies on pheromones. As Chapters 3 and 7 in particular will try to show, a few spectacular theoretical edifices have been built on pretty shaky neuroscientific ground.

Some in cultural studies have followed a familiar 'find one great theorist of the past' strategy. The philosopher/psychologist William James, writing in the late 19th century, often fills the bill. Ranging further afield, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank (1995) 'rediscovered' the works of Yale psychologist Silvan Tomkins,

from the 1960s, editing a collection of his writings (cf. also Probyn, 2004a, 2005; Frank, 2007; McIlwain, 2007). It is easy to see the appeal of Tomkins and why Sedgwick and Probyn say that they ‘fell for’ him. His writing was quirky, humane and phenomenologically acute. Re-discovery was a lovely thing to happen, but it does feel rather random. Why not take up Magda Arnold who also produced an opus on affect in the 1960s? Arnold was one of the few established women researchers in mid-20th century psychology. Her work on emotional appraisal (Arnold and Glasson, 1954) is much more congenial to cultural investigation in so very many ways. Whatever the routes, the writings of William James, Silvan Tomkins and Magda Arnold need to be set, however, in the context of recent psychobiological research.

One of my goals in writing this book is to try to be a bit more systematic and review more thoroughly the key threads of existing knowledge around affect and emotion. My aim is to build the basis for an inter-disciplinary account of affect (thereby setting myself up for a fall for sure). I come to this from the standpoint of social psychology, and that feels like an advantage. Social psychologists are more used to treading the shaky bridge between conventional psychology and the social sciences. We can offer a more confident and critical approach to psychobiology, and yet we also read sociology, social theory and cultural studies. We know some of the fault-lines in psychobiology, just as we can often tell when political science and cultural studies are winging it in their appeals to the psychological.

The new emphasis on affect leaves social science somewhat rudderless – the old conceptual tools and knowledge technologies no longer seem trustworthy. Yet affect presents a huge theoretical and practical challenge. How can we engage with phenomena that can be read simultaneously as somatic, neural, subjective, historical, social and personal? What are the best ways to move forward?

Lines of Argument

As I noted earlier, like other social psychologists before me (e.g. Brown and Stenner, 2009; Burkitt, 2002; Walkerdine, 2009), I will be suggesting that the familiar social science concept of *practice* offers the best, bare bones, synthesising rubric for research on affect. It offers the most effective, accurate and productive account of affect’s pattern and logic. I’ll explain that claim shortly. First, I want to describe three lines of approach that need to be at the heart of new work on affect. I see these as conceptual and empirical routes into the central features of affect for social research, picking out the things needing to be explained and summing up the best ways in. Then, in the following section, I want to identify three lines of approach I will be arguing constitute wrong turns. Some of these are historical and some are current. These are the moves I think block and impede social research on affect and stand in the way of adequate accounts. Claims sketched here are developed across the book as a whole.

Affect as flowing activity

Affect is always 'turned on' and 'simmering', moving along, since social action is continually embodied. But, affect also comes in and out of focus. The ongoing flow of affective activity can take shape as a particular kind of affective performance, episode or occasion, as in, for instance, a child's tantrum, a self-aggrandising narrative, or a bounded experience of joy. Affective practices unfurl, become organised, and effloresce with particular rhythms. Understanding the chronological patterning of these figurations, along with their sequencing and 'parsing', is crucial. Something like self-pity, for instance, can flare up, rise to a crescendo and diminish in pace with the changing medley of 'interpretative repertoires' being articulated. (Interpretative repertoires are threads of sense-making that work through familiar tropes, metaphors and formulations – Wetherell and Potter, 1988.) Self-pity can vanish and then re-appear half an hour later.

Figurations of affect have different durations. Affective phenomena distinguished by the most intense bodily pushes (such as a panic attack) usually occur in bursts or relatively short episodes, simply because bodily manifestations of strong affect tend to decay quite quickly and the body moves on quite rapidly. Even Frau Troffea and the dancing afflicted seem to have wound down eventually. Other types of affective practice can involve a semi-continuous set of background feelings which are more long-lasting, moving in and out of focus as a steady shifting accompaniment to one's days, perhaps shifting now and then into more intense phases dominated by the body. An affective practice can be made up of cycles of recurrence of affective activities over days, weeks and months, like the Christian year, or the cycle of 'work on the self' as good intentions lead to determined resolutions, to failures, to guilt, to the berating of self, to giving up, to self-indulgence, to good intentions, etc. Cycles of affective practice might persist for a short period or they may last, and be reworked, over many hundreds of years. Like the dancing plagues, an affective practice may endure as a potential figuration for several centuries, as a latent if rare response, before becoming almost unimaginable to later populations.

This dynamic and mobile character of affect has come into focus through the relational and process ontologies and methodologies characteristic of new directions in social theory found, for example, in Actor Network Theory (Latour, 2005; Law, 1994; Law and Hassard, 1999; Law and Mol, 2006), feminist technoscience (Haraway, 2004), in cultural geography (Massey, 2005; Thrift, 2008a), in Deleuzian scholarship (Deleuze 1988, 1994) and in recent revivals of Whitehead's metaphysics (Stengers, 1997; Stenner, 2008, see Brown and Stenner, 2009, for a lucid overview of Deleuze and Whitehead). This work emphasises the interconnected nature of social life and provides ways to think about these relations. Haraway, for example, describes her 'pulling on the threads' approach (2004, p. 338). She works with 'figures' – genes, races, cyborgs, coyotes, seeds – and treats these like balls of yarn or knots where her task is to pull out the dense connections that produce these patterns. Pursuing the figure of the foetus, for example, she finds herself discussing corporate investment strategies, and then migration patterns in north-eastern Brazil, and then why little girls perform caesarean sections on their dolls ...



Affective practices can be knotted and entangled in the same kinds of ways with wide ranges of potential connections. Flows of affect can mesh, for example, with the manufactured flows of images on television screens (Wood, 2009) and with the imaginaries streaming through darkened cinemas (Connolly, 2002). They can unfurl in step with the animation, technology and potentialities of the video game (Walkerline, 2007). Affective flows can become articulated with large-scale social changes such as patterns of modernisation, rural–urban shifts, equality movements and the logics of capitalism. Harriet Nielsen and Monica Rudberg compared, for instance, stories of adolescence from three Norwegian generations of women (daughters, mothers and grandmothers spanning the period from 1910 to 1990). They documented how the modest stoicism of emotional ‘coping’ and ‘enduring’ evident among the grandmothers gave way to hyper-reflexive exploration of the significance and meaning of one’s feelings among the urbanised modern mothers, and then to ironic play with confessional genres among the postmodern daughters (Nielsen, 2003; Nielsen and Rudberg, 2000). Similarly, in a banal but profound way, the body story line developed by ‘Richard’ (Maggie Turp’s patient) was enacted through his colliding intersections with flows of commuters moving through the city, while the spaces of the underground became his affective theatre.

Analyses of affective practices, in other words, will take as their subject how these practices are situated and connected, whether that articulation and intermeshing is careful, repetitive and predictable or contingently thrown together in the moment with what else is to hand. Affective practice is continually dynamic with the potential to move in multiple and divergent directions. Accounts of affect will need to wrestle with this mobility. But, does that mean, then, that a flow of affect is entirely indeterminate?

Pattern – grooves, habits, machines, assemblages

I will be arguing that affect does display strong pushes for pattern as well as signalling trouble and disturbance in existing patterns. Many recent commentators would disagree with this emphasis. From their perspective, the disruptive force of affect seems its most impressive and important feature. The philosopher Alphonse Lingis (2000), for instance, argues that emotions are ‘dangerous’. Following a long philosophical tradition, he regards emotions as like colours and energies. Emotions resemble, he suggests, gusts of wind, the movements of molecules, the power of the lion, and the shivering of the sea. Similarly, but less viscerally and poetically, Martha Nussbaum (2001) defines emotions as ‘upheavals of thought’, while Sianne Ngai (2005) argues that emotions can be seen as ‘unusually knotted or condensed interpretations of predicaments’ (p. 3, following Terada, 2001). It is affect’s dramatic and turbulent qualities, along with the random, the chaotic and the spontaneous, which have marked it out as special for many.

This is misleading. Affect is about sense as well as sensibility. It is practical, communicative and organised. In affective practice, bits of the body (e.g. facial





muscles, thalamic-amygdala pathways in the brain, heart rate, regions of the prefrontal cortex, sweat glands, etc.) get patterned together with feelings and thoughts, interaction patterns and relationships, narratives and interpretative repertoires, social relations, personal histories, and ways of life. These components and modalities, each with their own logic and trajectories, are assembled together in interacting and recursive, or back and forth, practical methods. Pattern layers on pattern, forming and re-forming. Somatic, neural, phenomenological, discursive, relational, cultural, economic, developmental, and historical patterns interrupt, cancel, contradict, modulate, build and interweave with each other. Some affective practices might involve only a couple of contributing patterns, and some of these might decompose quickly. Other affective practices, in contrast, might be very densely knotted in with connected social practices where the degree of knitting reinforces the affect and can make it resistant and durable, sometimes unbearably so. Different elements in an affective pattern can vary in their intensity and in their dominance in the whole. In a panic attack, for example, the push of the body and the power of a figuration of a situation as threatening are extreme and unusually resistant to any other ordering forces.

Interweaving patterns often form affective ruts. The first instance of frenzied dancing in 1518 Strasbourg, although it had precursors, must have been quite eerie and strange. But, thereafter, a groove was cut in the social psychological life of the community. The dancing plague attributed to St Vitus created channels through which meanings and body/brain responses flowed for a few months. Among all the very many things that bodies and brains can do, and among all the jostling possibilities for interpreting, representing and making sense, some became recruited, selected and articulated together. Similarly, for melancholic communities and the body story lines of personal history, some affective practices clearly stabilise, solidify and become habit.

The interrelated patterning of affective practice can be held inter-subjectively across a few or many participants. It can thread across a scene, a site or an institution and is spatialised, too, in complex ways. Intriguingly, an affective practice can be 'held' in a particular place. Further solidification comes into view when we consider the affective practices of entire social categories and historical periods. We begin to discern what Raymond Williams (1977) called 'structures of feeling', although 'structure' is not the right term for the complex coalescences Williams was trying to evoke. Swirling and dissolving emotion, he suggested, precipitates in social formations, becoming distinct ways of doing things, familiar figurations repeated often *ad nauseam*. We begin to see how particular kinds of emotional subjects and citizens are repetitively materialised (see Ahmed, 2004a).

In effect, you could say that over time 'affective machines' emerge in social and personal life. I am using the term machine here, at first at least, metaphorically in the novelist Iris Murdoch's sense rather than going straight to Deleuze and Guattari's (1977) concept, although the latter is probably more familiar to social researchers. In a series of novels written in the 1960s and early 1970s Murdoch talked about her characters as enslaved by machines. What she meant was a conventional socio-emotional pattern of feelings, thoughts, positions and desires that





had a kind of inexorable and often damaging logic. Murdoch's most frequent reference was to the machine of romantic infatuation (cf. her novels *The Black Prince* and *The Sacred and Profane Love Machine*). Once this possibility appeared on the horizon, her characters became tied into a predictable range of daydreams, idealisations, mistakes, narcissisms and despairs unfolding with an already outlined and familiar pace and shape. Other machines in her novels were the machine of guilt, confession, penitence and redemption, and the machine of masochistic self-exclusion. Affective machines draw people like magnets, 'herding us along like brutes', and in her novels require a supreme act of reformulation and self re-making or the dramatic intervention of others to be broken (e.g. Murdoch, 1967 [1964], p. 167).

Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical concept of 'desiring machines' has some similar resonances. Here, the notion of machine is also in part shorthand for the organisation of activity and desire into social psychological pattern ('paranoiac machines, miraculating machines, and celibate machines', 1977, p. 38). Deleuze and Guattari were interested in how forms of order create breaks and cuts in flows of action, making connections between different patterns, and come to constitute flows in the first place. A desiring machine could thus be a positive or a negative form of order, or both, depending on the oppressive or creative consequences. As Brown and Stenner (2009, p. 192) describe, it was superseded in Deleuze and Guattari's later work by the term 'assemblage' (sometimes proposed as 'machinic assemblages', e.g. Tamboukou, 2008a):

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari substitute the word *agencement*, usually translated as *assemblage*. Whilst the term machine carries with it unfortunate resonances of functionalism and boundedness, assemblage has the various meanings of 'arrangement', 'laying out' or 'putting together' (see Wise, 2005, p. 77). It also connotes the process activity of arranging things together. An assemblage of desire is then, like Foucault's apparatus, a heterogeneous arrangement of elements that are contingently laid out together. (Brown and Stenner, 2009, p. 192)

I agree with Brown and Stenner that the connotations don't work – machine is evocative but not quite right. Machines, mechanical processes and mechanisms suggest something automatic, industrial, causal and determined, which is why some writers in the late 18th and early 19th centuries such as Thomas Carlyle and Matthew Arnold (Williams, 1958) were so wary of them. The English translation of *agencement* as 'assemblage' is a bit static also. It misses the agency and the 'could be otherwise'. Uses of 'assemblage' in archaeology, for instance, assume that once elements accumulate, their relation and the information they convey is fixed, while *agencement* in French implies something much more active, such as the making of a tool or a kit bag of possibilities. In general, the kind of patterning I am trying to highlight is best captured by more active terms such as 'composing', 'figuring', 'entangling', 'mobilising' and 'recruiting'. Something, in other words, that comes into shape and continues to change and refigure as it flows on. Bruno Latour (2004) and Vinciane Despret (2004a, 2004b) talk usefully in this vein about





the ways in which body capacities, social relations and combinations of narratives get pulled into new 'articulations'.

I will come back to some of this discussion in later chapters. For now, I simply note that the study of affect is inextricably to do with the study of pattern. These are patterns which are multiple, dynamic, intersecting, sometimes personal and sometimes impersonal. Patterns are sometimes imposed, sometimes a matter of actively 'seeing a way through' to what comes next, and sometimes, like a repertoire, simply what is to hand, relatively ready-made and 'thoughtless'. It is a case of recognising too, though, that affective phenomena can often remain simply ineffable. Attempts to find order can break down as the dynamism of the phenomenon, the fuzziness and instability of any descriptions of affective states, and sheer exuberant and excessive possibilities of the body become apparent.

Power, value and capital

I have mentioned the varying durations of affective practice and their historical range. Affective practices also vary hugely in scale – they effloresce for the solitary subject, they are played out in twos and threes, they are stabilised in families and small groups, but they can also be massively scaled up. Affect can be distributed across, and engage many millions in, communal celebrations, in shared jokes, or in collective moods of lugubrious moaning and complaining, forming what Lauren Berlant (1997) calls a 'national present tense'. With this scaling up, questions about power, the regulation of affect, its uneven distribution and its value (which are relevant also in the smaller scales) become even more prominent.

In the example of the melancholic white English voices we began to see the direct resonances between affect and power. Power works through affect, and affect emerges in power. Sara Ahmed (2004a, 2004b) has developed a highly generative way of thinking about this as 'affective economy'. This focuses on how 'affective value' or 'emotional capital' comes to be assigned to some figures rather than others and to some emotional displays. Just who, for example, can take up the affective subject positions evident in Clarke et al.'s interviews with white English citizens and in what contexts is this particular lamentation and assertion of victimhood sensible? What affective practices confer 'distinction' on those who perform them and how has this changed over time? Affect powers and intertwines with cultural circuits of value as some get marked out as disgusting and others as exemplifying modern virtue (Ahmed, 2004a; Skeggs, 2010; Skeggs and Wood, 2009).

A number of those writing recently on social class, for instance, have argued that affect and the psychosocial are key technologies in class positioning and class privilege (e.g. Charlesworth, 2000; Kirk, 2007; Lawler, 2005; Reay et al., 2011; Sayer, 2005). Beverley Skeggs (2004a, 2010), for example, argues that for white working-class women, carefully traversing the terrain of 'respectability', the reflexive practice of affect has been essential for maintaining position. Explorations of affect, power and value pose, too, the issue of conformity. What is the individual's



relationship with what Reddy (2001) calls an 'emotional regime'? He argues for a significant gap between the emotional rules found in any social formation and experience. Is this gap the source of emotional suffering, he asks? Are some emotional regimes worse than others?

Power, then, is crucial to the agenda of affect studies. It leads to investigations of the unevenness of affective practices. How are practices clumped, who gets to do what when, and what relations does an affective practice make, enact, disrupt and reinforce? Who is emotionally privileged, who is emotionally disadvantaged and what does this privilege and disadvantage look like? Whether this is usefully seen as a form of 'capital', an element, perhaps, of cultural capital or social capital, remains to be explored.

Wrong Turns

As I worked through the current research on affect, it was often easier to decide what I was against rather than what I was for. Flows of activity, pattern and power emerged as compelling along with the obvious advantages of theories of social practice. But much current writing on affect seemed to block rather connect necessary lines of thinking. I have already noted that in some cases the application of Deleuzian concepts of affect, understood as force or intensity, to research on the textures of affective social life has been stifling. I want to outline now what emerged for me as three, further, frustrating wrong turns. Again, the detailed justifications are in the chapters to come.

Basic emotions versus social construction

The first wrong turn I want to identify is mainly historical and appears with hindsight – it is the packaging of affect through the debate between 'basic emotions' and 'social construction'. But the effects of this framing linger, and 'basic emotions' thinking, for instance, still percolates throughout celebrated popular science accounts of emotion such as Antonio Damasio's (1995, 1999, 2004) texts.

Until quite recently it was pretty unrewarding for a social scientist to engage with neuroscience and psychology. The disconnection between social and biological analyses of emotion was almost total. Both could only talk past each other.

Throughout the 1980s and the 1990s, anthropologists and social psychologists, particularly social constructionist researchers, were finding in study after study huge variability and contingency in emotional lives, and in how people across the globe narrated and interpreted their physiological states. Psychologists and neuroscientists, on the other hand, typically dealt with only a small set of what were seen as universal and genetically determined 'psychological primitives'. The basic emotions paradigm that dominated the psychobiology of affect was a deep investment in the idea that emotion routines are programmed, that

affect templates are innate residues of archaic pasts, and that the 'colour wheel of affect' falls into relatively discrete patterns (e.g. Ekman and Davidson, 1994, for reviews and discussions of basic emotions).

Psychologists and neuroscientists studied closed circuits entirely abstracted from their social contexts. As Arlie Hochschild comments (1983, p. 27), emotion was investigated 'as a sealed biological event, something that external stimuli can bring on, as cold weather brings on a cold'. Social scientists were left struggling to incorporate the body and biology since there was little biological science matching the variability they were finding in the field. Social constructionist researchers worked on what they described as 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1983), 'discourses' (Abu-Lughod and Lutz, 1990; Lupton, 1998), 'emotionology' (Stearns with Stearns, 1985) and local rules for interpreting emotion states (Harré, 1986). This work could make little sense of the vivacity and life of the body, while neuroscience acted as though the provocative situatedness and creativity of social life could be safely ignored. There seemed to be no biology commensurate with what the social scientist knew, while every biologist knew that affect had to be much more than a cultural script. In this context, some researchers developed 'biocultural' syntheses that might encompass both. But these typically preserved the autonomy of each level of analysis and looked for additive solutions, holding a biological 'substrate' constant, while allowing cultural variations expressive play.

The example of the dancing plague demonstrates the problems with both approaches. Basic emotions research argues that there are six (or maybe five or seven) universal primary human emotions – anger, happiness, sadness, surprise, disgust and fear – and a more nebulous set of secondary emotions. From this point of view, Frau Troffea's reactions are off the radar. Her affect doesn't fit. This doesn't seem to be a display of anger, or of grief. What were the dancers experiencing – did they feel any joy at all? But Frau Troffea's affect is surely the kind of thing a psychology of emotion should be able to encompass? It should not be a major hurdle that affect seems to be relative to its cultural context. In an important sense, modern European citizens can never fully unravel Frau Troffea's act. I am unable to enter directly into the psycho-logic of her times, be motivated as she was motivated, or to satisfactorily translate her actions into modern psychological and psychiatric accounts. This specificity begins to cast doubt on the claim that emotions come in discrete types and in basic universal forms shared by all humans across time and space.

But, on the other hand, it does not seem satisfactory either to analyse Frau Troffea's actions just as an example of 'emotionology'. The historians Peter Stearns and Carol Stearns (1985) argue that each society and historical period has its own sets of norms guiding how affect should be expressed, theories for the causes, and categorisations of different types. The term emotionology (which they coined) sums up these differing gestalts and the characteristic assemblages distinguishing particular periods. According to Thomas Dixon (2003), the emotionology that permeates Western understandings emerged quite late in its current form, between 1800 and 1850. It post-dates the dancing plagues. This perhaps explains their strangeness to my eyes.



Emotionology is interesting but too anaemic as a characterisation of the social patterning of affect. It maintains the increasingly sterile division of labour between the biological and the cultural. The concept suggests that it might be possible to analyse the cultural, mental, social, psychological and ideological elements of affect separately from the physical and biological elements. The notion of affective practice I will be advocating in this book heads off in a different, and I hope more promising, direction. An affective practice is a figuration where body possibilities and routines become recruited or entangled together with meaning-making and with other social and material figurations. It is an organic complex in which all the parts relationally constitute each other. Fortunately, as Chapter 2 will show, recent work in psychology and neuroscience, freed from basic emotions, now proposes something similar.

The rubbishing of discourse

For many people working within cultural studies (e.g. Clough, 2007; Massumi, 2002; Sedgwick, 2003; Thrift, 2004, 2008a) it sometimes seems that what is most exciting about affect is that it is *not* discourse. Affect seems to index a realm beyond talk, words and texts, beyond epistemic regimes, and beyond conscious representation and cognition. In short, it is something unfamiliar in social science communities bored with at least 20–30 years of the ‘discursive turn’ and with so very many unmasking investigations of the ways in which language constructs identities, subjectivities, communities, polities and histories. The argument for ‘going beyond’, detaching affect from the domesticating and neutering effects of discourse, is compelling. But I also want to pull studies of affect back to think again about affective meaning-making.

Some analyses of affect, such as Brian Massumi’s (1996), split discourse and affect into two tracks and privilege the track of the body or the process of becoming, and the moment of impact and change. This again seems a wrong turn. Massumi draws a thick line between bodily movements or forces and social sense-making. Body activities (affectings of the body as a result of encounters) are seen as generative, potentially creative and radical, while the track of discourse (describing the body and ruminating about affect) is thought to add just the usual scripts, conforming narratives, and the subjectifications of social power (cf. Hemmings, 2005 for a review and critique). For many, discourse is seen as *taming* affect, codifying its generative force (e.g. Lingis, 1991, pp. 119–20). On the contrary, I shall argue that it is the discursive that very frequently makes affect powerful, makes it radical and provides the means for affect to travel.

Other theorists, like Nigel Thrift (2008a) and his colleagues in cultural geography (Anderson, 2003, 2006, 2009; Dewsbury, 2003; McCormack, 2003, 2006, 2007), want to build what Thrift describes as ‘non-representational theory’. The target is not just inadequate pictorial metaphors for knowledge generation or Cartesian notions of the mind as ‘re-presenting’ the world and activities of the body, although this is part of it. Non-representational theory is an attempt to





get at processes that are placed below 'thresholds of conscious contemplation' (McCormack, 2003, p. 488) so that cultural geographers can describe, for example, how the senses are assailed as citizens wander the city, and how their affects (their rage, joy, disgust, malice and surprise, etc.) are automatically triggered by the ways cityscapes are engineered and built. In this vein, one recent text on political affect (Protevi, 2009, p. xii) describes the task as building a 'political physiology'. Protevi wants to pick out what he calls a class of 'politically triggered basic emotions' in which the social speaks directly to the body 'by-passing subjectivity' so that the somatic and the social are linked directly.

To be fair, Protevi does go on to think about socially distributed, affective cognition, drawing on some of the long fascinating traditions of work on embodied minds in social and developmental psychology. But, in general, the large initial claims made for the non-representational, for unmediated, pre-social body tracks, and for direct connections between the social and the somatic are radically misleading. They are incoherent as a social psychology of affect. Worse, I think, these approaches block useful and pragmatic empirical work on affect and the building of inter-disciplinary foundations for the sake of what is largely a chimera. They place some of the most random and least important affective phenomena on a pedestal and take them as generic.

I will be arguing that human affect is inextricably linked with meaning-making and with the semiotic (broadly defined) and the discursive. It is futile to try to pull them apart. An affective practice like a dancing plague recruits material objects, institutions, pasts and anticipated futures. But the main things that an affective practice folds or composes together are bodies and meaning-making. Affect, for sure, was manifested in the frenzied drumming of feet in wooden clogs. Frau Troffea's state (however we might describe it) was made visible through her 'bodily reverberation' to use a phrase from William James (cited in Oatley et al., 2006, p. 116). But, very clearly, existing narratives and discursive repertoires in terms of the supernatural battle between saints and demons, and between saints and wayward earthly citizens, were also customised and re-worked as part of this new scene, generating and reinforcing it. The dancing plague, this particular affective practice, certainly created disorder and chaos. Nonetheless, like other affective practices, it constituted an ordering of bodily possibilities, narratives, sense-making, and local social relations.

There are some major issues, of course, involved in determining the kinds of discourse studies likely to make the most useful contribution to analysing affective phenomena. The critics are right, I feel, to be sceptical about the capacities and power of broad-brush post-structuralist discourse theory in this respect. These approaches do falter in very obvious ways when faced with the dynamic affective activity of everyday life. Similarly, analyses of affective meaning-making found in ethnomethodology, conversation analysis and discursive psychology don't go far enough in the connections they make and set too many unnecessary methodological blocks. But these are not the only ways to analyse discourse, and in particular the psycho-discursive practices (Edley, 2001; Wetherell, 1998) characteristic of affective performances. Given the sustained critique of discourse theory found in





the turn to affect, what is surprising, in fact, is how applicable some of the key concepts of eclectic social psychological discourse analysis (such as interrogating subject positions, dilemmas, moments of trouble, repertoires, etc.) remain for analysing affective practice.

Celebrating the uncanny

I have suggested that there is something wrong with the new scholarship on affect when it draws a thick dividing line between bodies and talk and texts. Similarly, treatments of affect focused principally on the uncanny also block pragmatic approaches to the analysis of affect.

For over a hundred years now, the aspect of affect which has most intrigued social commentators is the spread of emotion from body to body, so fast indeed that a very mysterious force seems to be involved. The extent and scale of affective transmission so impressed historians working on the St Vitus cults they chose viral metaphors like 'plagues' and 'epidemics' to characterise the flow. Early psychologists of the crowd such as Gustav Le Bon thought in terms of 'contagion' and 'suggestion' (Reicher, 2001). Recent cultural studies, equally, have been fascinated by these phenomena (e.g. Brennan, 2004). Brennan speculates that the mysterious transmitting force is in fact based on smell (as well as touch, hearing and sight). She argues that affective transmission is powered by pheromones in the air generated by one body's reaction, which automatically triggers a cascading response in other bodies. But does fear, or aggression, or melancholy spread like an air-borne virus as this work suggests? Or is it a possibility, a plan, an opportunity, an identity, a formulation of a situation, and a solution that are transmitted? As Lisa Blackman (2007/2008, 2008) notes, terms such as 'contagion', 'suggestion', 'group minds' and 'trance states' reach back into unresolved business in the history of psychology. She questions the extent to which they can be uncritically carried forward into new social and cultural theory.

Psychoanalytic writing on affect similarly frequently relies on the uncanny as a main literary mode. The unconscious is certainly relevant but how to theorise it and whether it works as a dynamic and eerie force is up for debate. Affective practice typically implicates a large, non-conscious, hinterland of associations, habits, ingrained relational patterns and semiotic links. Clearly, sometimes we are not aware of what we are doing as we do it. We only become conscious of how our bodies and minds have been recruited and entangled after the event. Affect can exhibit quite a startling degree of automaticity, too. Body states in sharp bursts often appear 'unbidden' (Ekman, 1994). They are suffered rather than acted, and the tears, blushes, fainting and jolting have their own involuntary motion. For most of us, as Damasio points out, trying to control an emotion can be as difficult as trying to control a sneeze (1999, p. 49). It seems we have some control over some aspects of what appears externally, such as facial expressions and body movements, but less control over what is happening internally (Oatley et al., 2006). Interestingly, actors and musicians trained in emotional



performance are much more skilled at regulating the flow of emotion both internally and externally (Damasio, 1999, p. 50).

I will be arguing that this automaticity and the non-conscious aspects of emotions are not well explained, however, by psychoanalytic notions of a dynamic unconscious formed through repression. They are not addressed either by dividing representation from the non-representational, marking out the former as the province of consciousness and deliberation, and the latter as the province of the unconscious and the unconsidered. Non-conscious affect is not quite the same as the dynamic unconscious. There are some hugely complex puzzles to be solved around the establishment of affective habits whose origins and meanings are unclear and over-determined (such as Richard's body bumping practice in the third example above). But, I will be arguing that, although undoubtedly a powerful therapeutic technology and potentially healing craft-theory, an appeal to the dynamic unconscious is an inadequate ground for social research on affect.

I will be contrasting social psychoanalytic approaches (e.g. Baraitser and Frosh, 2007; Campbell, 2007; Craib, 1994, 2001; Frosh, 2008; Hollway, 2010; Hollway and Jefferson, 2005; Redman, 2009) with my own approach based on affective practices. A practice approach focuses on processes of developmental sedimentation, routines of emotional regulation, relational patterns and 'settling'. These routinely embed patterns of affective practices as a kind of potential. The individual is a site in which multiple sources of activation and information about body states, situations, past experiences, linguistic forms, flowering thoughts, etc. become woven together. Psychological stabilisation occurs when the 'disaggregated self', to use Reddy's (2001) terminology, 'translates' the multiple 'codes' of bodies, cognitive activity and language, consciously or more automatically, into subjective qualia, into further actions and into internal and external self-descriptions which may or may not be further translated into public accounts and narratives for various audiences. This is a very different account from, for instance, Winnicott or Melanie Klein's accounts of the psyche/soma, and from psychoanalytic accounts of affective processes such as projective identification.

A Note on Practice

Practice [is] the point at which three things converge: the law of system, the quick of activity, and the reflective gaze of value ... What if, instead of sharing a grammar, speakers shared routine ways of acting, similar perspectives, a sense of space, or common ways of evaluating speech? (Hanks, 1990, pp. 11, 13, cited in M. Goodwin, 2006, p. 264)

The concept of practice I am advocating as the backbone of my approach is eclectic. Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) work on the 'logic of practice' was in many ways



the most generative source, but also Gilles Deleuze's (e.g. 1992, 2007) various conceptions of 'becoming' and 'desire', Sherry Ortner's (2006) work on 'serious games', Judith Butler's (1990) notion of performativity and also ethnomethodological thinking about 'members methods for accomplishing social life' (Heritage, 1984). There are some important differences between these approaches but a lot is shared. Theodore Schatzki (2001) outlines the very many advantages of practice thinking. This is a way of conceptualising social action as constantly in motion while yet recognising too that the past, and what has been done before, constrains the present and the future. Practice is both a noun and a verb. It is an activity and for participants (and social analysts) it is also an established reference point and site of repetition – a practice – the way I, or we, do things, and sometimes cannot help but do so again. Practice is about improvisation, it is about training, and as Nikolas Rose (1998) has powerfully demonstrated, practices that work on the psychological such as affective practices are also a form of discipline and control.

Studies of social practice tend to go backwards and forwards, in fact, between emphasising either unpredictable creativity or stifling conventionality. Bourdieu (1990), for example, or Foucault (2000), place most emphasis on how practices congeal and constrain, producing difficult to shift social formations, hierarchies, epistemic regimes and patterns of distinction. Deleuze allows much more play, while ethnomethodology takes nothing for granted and demonstrates how routines mutate, are always flexibly tailored to the particular circumstances, and thus need to be worked up again and again, afresh each time. All of these emphases have to be useful for understanding the phenomena of affect as these are often innovative and creative but also can be stubbornly lodged and painfully unmoveable.

I have taken my central term *affective practice* from Valerie Walkerdine's (2009, 2010) work on 'affective communities'. Although she doesn't elaborate a practice account, and prefers a more psychoanalytic and Deleuzian trajectory in her own thinking on affect, her work was a hugely important stimulus. Affective practice is a better concept, I think, than affective event or affective encounter because it builds in 'ongoingness' and makes one think about patterns in process. Lisa Blackman (2007a, 2007/2008), in her genealogical work on affect, distinguishes between the stream of work on spooky suggestion and contagion mentioned above and an alternative, and no less dominant stream in theory and popular culture that has emphasised emotional habits (the habits of happiness, for instance). Practice certainly pushes more towards habit than the uncanny, but it is elastic enough to guide thinking about the patterning of extraordinary, spontaneous and one-off affective activities. Sometimes affect starts from scratch, and sometimes, as Lauren Berlant (2008a) points out, we are very obviously engaged in a process of 'emotional quotation' or 'affective citation', endlessly plagiarising our own and others' past practice.

In developing this account of affective practices, I have been influenced by important and highly productive bodies of work emerging in social psychology, psychosocial studies and critical psychology (e.g. Baraitser and Frosh, 2007; Blackman,





2008, 2010; Blackman et al., 2008; Brown and Stenner, 2001, 2009; Burkitt, 1997, 2002; Campbell, 2007; Cromby, 2007a; Despret, 2004a, 2004b; Frosh, 2006, 2008; Hollway, 2006, 2010; Lewis, 2009; Middleton and Brown, 2005; Motzkau, 2009; Phoenix, 2008; Redman, 2009; Squire, 2001; Tamboukou, 2003, 2008b; Venn, 2010). In addition, I have drawn on a further, in some ways more surprising, source, one that I have mentioned a few times already. This is William Reddy's (2001, 2009) attempt to develop a theory of emotions fit for empirical historical research. Although I disagree with a number of his conclusions, he offers an incisive route through the complex cognitive psychology of emotion, along with a model of inter-disciplinary engagement. These lines of work inflect the study of affect in different ways; but, they offer more grounded approaches than much of the rest of the social sciences of affect and need to be taken up more widely.

Amongst this work, my approach in this book is perhaps closest to, and owes the greatest debt to, the elegant account of emotion developed by Ian Burkitt (1997, 2002; see Redman, 2009). Moving across a wide range of precursors, such as Spinoza, Bateson, Vygotsky, Barthes, Williams and Foucault, Burkitt argues for an analysis of emotions as 'complexes'. He suggests that an emotion complex is relational, both discursive and pre-discursive. His emphasis on relationality is vital. Following Gregory Bateson, Burkitt emphasises that an emotion, like anger or fear, is not an object inside the self, as basic emotions research assumes, but is a relation to others, a response to a situation and to the world. An emotion is above all a relational pattern and as such, I would say, is automatically distributed and located across the psychosocial field. Affect is never wholly owned, always intersecting and interacting. Given that is so, it seems to me that affective practice is the 'smallest' or most coherent unit of analysis possible for the social science of affect.

Burkitt describes how emotions rest on body responses that provoke, and turn into, feelings. Feelings, he argues, are examples of 'practical consciousness' in Raymond Williams' (1977) terminology. They are often unarticulated and inchoate senses of the pattern in a relation or in a situation, part of the affective-volitional stream of everyday life that moves us, as Vygotsky argued, to one end or another. Feeling as practical consciousness is thus a kind of intuitive 'know how', a sometimes pre-conceptual and often ineffable meaning structure, schema or 'image repertoire' that guides action. Burkitt argues that feelings are not *expressed* in discourse so much as *completed* in discourse. That is, the emotion terms and narratives available in a culture, the conventional elements so thoroughly studied by social constructionist researchers, realise the affect and turn it for the moment into a particular kind of thing. What may start out as inchoate can sometimes be turned into an articulation, mentally organised and publicly communicated, in ways that engage with and reproduce regimes and power relations.

Conceptualising these processes as examples of affective practice rather than as 'complexes', is, I think, a good way of taking Burkitt's work forward. It adds more movement and more sociality. It is not just consciousness that is 'practical' but all the elements of an affective performance. I will be arguing in Chapter 3 that there



is more to the making of affective meaning than acts of 'completing'. More attention needs to be given, also, to interaction and inter-subjectivity.

The Book Ahead

There are at least two possible routes through this book. First, I have tried to gather together the main lines of thinking about affect currently preoccupying social researchers, and to critically interrogate these. And so, if you want a guided tour of the field from a highly interested spectator with her own views on these thinkers and on others not mentioned, Antonio Damasio, Paul Ekman, Klaus Scherer and Lisa Feldman Barrett can be found in Chapter 2; Brian Massumi, Nigel Thrift, Patricia Ticento Clough and William Reddy in Chapter 3; Marjorie Goodwin, Jack Katz, Daniel Stern and Derek Edwards in Chapter 4; Raymond Williams, Pierre Bourdieu, Diane Reay and Bev Skeggs in Chapter 5; Gail Lewis, Sigmund Freud, Lynne Layton, Michael Billig and Christopher Bollas in Chapter 6; and Sarah Ahmed, Teresa Brennan, Stephen Reicher and Thomas Ogden in Chapter 7.

In disciplinary terms, Chapter 2 reviews the recent research in psychology and neuroscience; Chapter 3 looks at affect in cultural studies and cultural history; Chapter 4, at affect in the 'ethnoscience' such as conversation analysis, discursive psychology and linguistic anthropology; Chapter 5 examines the sociology of affect, structures of feeling and notions of habitus along with affect and social value; Chapter 6 begins a conversation with social psychoanalysis and with models of affect without a subject; while Chapter 7 continues this dialogue and brings in some recent social psychology of mass affect and work on the cultural politics of emotion.

I have tried, though, to develop an account that might do more than point out the existing landmarks. From another angle, the book could be seen as organised around explicating different threads in the tangled activities making up affective practice – the bodying, negotiating, situating, solidifying, personalising and circulating of affect – and as an attempt to develop a pragmatic overarching perspective which might ground future social research.

I wanted to understand the physicality of affect, for example, in Chapter 2 and try to come to terms with what recent psychobiology has to say about this. Does what is known about the bodying of emotion rule out the trajectory I am following into affective practice? In Chapter 3 my aim was to work out a productive approach to the making of affective meaning and to the affective–discursive. In Chapter 4, my goal was to understand how affect is located, takes shape in the moment, and is always situated in some immediate context. But, in focusing on that, one loses sight of the long-term historical play of power so Chapter 5 was then an effort to understand the sedimenting of affect, and to argue for a kind of 'affective intersectionality'. This chapter became paired with Chapter 6, focused on affective trajectories and personal histories. How does affective practice take shape not just in social formations over time but also in individuals' lives? Finally,

in Chapter 7, I wanted to work out a line on affective transmission. What is going on when affect passes from one to another?

There is so much still to do, of course, to build a way of thinking to ground new research that might more easily, and less anxiously, traverse the body, the discursive, social contexts, histories, personal stories and affect's movement. Work that could, in other words, explore whatever figurations were relevant to a pressing research question without being blocked by forms of psychobiology that refuse to see connections with the cultural, or blocked by cultural studies that refuse to be interested in making meaning. It should be possible to explore the micro-organisation of affective episodes untrammelled by ethnomethodological reluctance to engage with questions of persistent social distinction and inequality. Ideally, investigations of the solidifications of affective practice should facilitate, not impede, investigations of plural subjectivities. And finally, it should be possible, too, to raise interesting questions about repetitions and personal biography without following social psychoanalysis into inherent psychological processes or into a mysterious uncanny. Indeed, these are the challenges which animated this book and which are taken up in the chapters which follow.