

## FOREWORD: WHAT AFFECTS ARE GOOD FOR

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The essays in this volume are evidence of what Patricia Clough identifies as an “affective turn” in the humanities and social sciences. Like the other “turns” that academic fields have undergone in recent decades—the linguistic turn, the cultural turn, and so forth—this focus on affects consolidates and extends some of the most productive existing trends in research. Specifically, the two primary precursors to the affective turn I see in U.S. academic work are the focus on the body, which has been most extensively advanced in feminist theory, and the exploration of emotions, conducted predominantly in queer theory.<sup>1</sup> Like the other turns, too, however, while extending previous research, this affective turn also opens new avenues for study, casts previous work in a fresh light, and indicates novel possibilities for politics. It might be useful, then, to take this opportunity to reflect briefly on what affects are good for.

A focus on affects certainly does draw attention to the body and emotions, but it also introduces an important shift. The challenge of the perspective of the affects resides primarily in the syntheses it requires. This is, in the first place, because affects refer equally to the body and the mind; and, in the second, because they involve both reason and the passions. Affects require us, as the term suggests, to enter the realm of causality, but they offer a complex view of causality because the affects belong simultaneously to both sides of the causal relationship. They illuminate, in other words, both our power to affect the world around us and our power to be affected by it, along with the relationship between these two powers.

Baruch Spinoza, the philosopher who has advanced furthest the theory of the affects and whose thought is the source, either directly or indirectly, of most of the contemporary work in this field, grasps the powers of the affects in terms of two sets of parallel developments or correspondences.<sup>2</sup> First, the mind’s power to think and its developments are, he proposes, parallel to the body’s power to act. This does not mean that the mind can determine the body to act, or that the body can determine the mind to think. On the contrary,

Spinoza maintains that mind and body are autonomous but that they nonetheless proceed or develop in parallel. Such a claim does not in any way resolve the question of the relation of body and mind; rather, it poses it as a problem or mandate for research: each time we consider the mind's power to think, we must try to recognize how the body's power to act corresponds to it—and the notion of correspondence here is importantly open and indefinite. An affect straddles this relationship insofar as it indicates at once the current state of the mind and the body. The perspective of the affects, in short, forces us constantly to pose the problem of the relationship between mind and body with the assumption that their powers constantly correspond in some way.

Spinoza also, secondly, proposes a correspondence between the power to act and the power to be affected. This applies equally to the mind and the body: the mind's power to think corresponds to its receptivity to external ideas; and the body's power to act corresponds to its sensitivity to other bodies. The greater our power to be affected, he posits, the greater our power to act. Once again, Spinoza proposes a correspondence but does not fix what determinate form it will take. And in this case, too, the notion of affect straddles the divide. In his terms, affects can be actions, that is, determined by internal causes, or passions, determined by external causes. On the one side we have reason, actions of the mind, along with actions of the body, which one might call provocatively corporeal reason; on the other side are the passions both of the mind and the body. The perspective of the affects does not assume that reason and passion are the same, but rather poses them together on a continuum. For Spinoza, the ethical and political project involves a constant effort to transform passions into actions, to replace encounters that result from external causes, which may be joyful or sad, with encounters determined by internal causes, which are necessarily joyful. And yet we need to remember that Spinoza's preference for internal causes does not lead to an isolation of any sort since every increase of the power to act and think corresponds to an increased power to be affected—the increased autonomy of the subject, in other words, always corresponds to its increased receptivity. One way of understanding this complex set of propositions, then, is simply to say that the perspective of the affects requires us constantly to pose as a problem the relation between actions and passions, between reason and the emotions. We do not know in advance what a body can do, what a mind can think—what affects they are capable of. The perspective of the affects requires an exploration of these as yet unknown powers. Spinoza thus gives us a new ontology of the human or, rather, an ontology of the human that is constantly open and renewed.

One of the central challenges for research posed by this Spinozian perspec-

tive of the affects, then, resides in the fact that the affects straddle these two divides: between the mind and body, and between actions and passions. The affects pose a problematic correspondence across each of the divides: between the mind's power to think and the body's power to act, and between the power to act and the power to be affected. These are some of the primary theoretical challenges that the texts in this volume, and indeed all those that would constitute the affective turn, must address.

To give one example of how the perspective of the affects, which I have thus far articulated only in philosophical terms, can be useful for social science research, allow me to explain briefly my own effort to employ it in order to understand recent changes in the dominant forms of labor and production. I use the term *affective labor* as a way to build on two rather disparate streams of research. The first stream is composed of work developed by U.S. feminists about gendered forms of labor that involve the affects in a central way—such as emotional labor, care, kin work, or maternal work—and that consider the nature and value of such activity both in the waged and unwaged economies.<sup>3</sup> The second stream primarily involves writings by French and Italian economists and labor sociologists who try to grasp the increasingly intellectual character of productive practices and the labor market as a whole, employing terms such as cognitive labor and the new cognitariat.<sup>4</sup> The term *affective labor* is meant to bring together elements from these two different streams and grasp simultaneously the corporeal and intellectual aspects of the new forms of production, recognizing that such labor engages at once with rational intelligence and with the passions or feeling.

Consider, for example, just to indicate the range of activities identified by this category, health care workers, flight attendants, fast food workers, and sex workers—all strongly gendered activities that, to a large degree, produce affects. Identifying these as forms of affective labor highlights not only the common qualities their products share but also the fact that in all these activities the body and the mind are simultaneously engaged, and that similarly reason and passion, intelligence and feeling, are employed together. The perspective of the affects requires, as I said earlier, that with respect to these forms of labor we pose as a problem the relations that bridge across the two divides, between the mind and body, and between reason and passion. Furthermore, the identification of a category of labor such as this that brings together conceptually a range of productive activities can be useful in a variety of ways—by clarifying, for example, the differences of this category of labor with respect to others, and for illuminating the divisions and hierarchies within this category. Finally, identifying the category of affective labor allows one further step:

to consider it together with the various other forms of labor whose products are in large part immaterial, that is, to think together the production of affects with the production of code, information, ideas, images, and the like. This analytical recognition suggests new political possibilities, bringing to light new and intensified forms of exploitation that are shared among a range of laboring activities and, most important, opening up avenues for political organizing and collective practices of refusal and liberation.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of my example about the concept of affective labor is simply to indicate the potential utility of the perspective of the affects in one field of study, demonstrating how it forces us to focus on the problematic correspondences that extend across its two primary divides—between the mind and body, and between reason and the passions—and how the new ontology of the human it reveals has direct implications for politics.

The innovative essays in this volume offer a series of other examples, demonstrating the potential of the perspective of the affects in a wide range of fields and with a variety of methodological approaches. Some of the essays, for example, use fieldwork to investigate the functions of affects—among organized sex workers, health care workers, and in the modeling industry. Others employ the discourses of microbiology, thermodynamics, information sciences, and cinema studies to rethink the body and the affects in terms of technology. Still others explore the affects of trauma in the context of immigration and war. And throughout all the essays run serious theoretical reflections on the powers of the affects and the political possibilities they pose for research and practice. The originality of these essays thus opens up several avenues for future work, and as a whole they furnish ample reason to believe that there exists a significant trend in academic research worthy of being called the affective turn.

Michael Hardt

## NOTES

1. Some of the classic examples of feminist theory that focuses on the body as a central problematic are Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). For work in queer theory on the emotions, in addition to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, eds., *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), which several essays in this volume cite, see the two collections edited by Lauren Berlant: *Intimacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); and *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

2. See Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *Complete Works*, ed. Edwin Curley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), esp. part 3, 1. Gilles Deleuze's interpretation gives the most complete and innovative reading of the affects in Spinoza. See his *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone, 1990). For an excellent example of contemporary work that draws creatively on Spinoza's theory of the affects and Deleuze's interpretation of it, see Brian Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

3. See, for example, Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Joan Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and Robin Leidner, *Fast Food, Fast Talk: Service Work and the Routinization of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

4. See, for example, Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, 133–47 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); and Carlo Vercellone, ed., *Sommes-nous sortis du capitalisme industriel?* (Paris: La Dispute, 2002).

5. See Michael Hardt, "Affective Labor," *Boundary 2* 26.2 (1999): 89–100; as well as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 289–294; and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 103–115.