

MISSED CONCEPTIONS

Affect is individual. Affect is transindividual. It is ontogenetically prior to the distinction between the individual understood as separate unit and the collective understood as a molar aggregate of separate units. It is “collective” in the sense that it expresses itself in collective individualizations (emergent populations of individuals whose formation is processually correlated at a distance, across their differences).

Affect is asocial. Corollary: *Affect must be socialized through mechanisms of mediation.* Affect, as the openness to being affected, is directly relational. It is pure sociality, in the sense of the social in the openness of its incipency, ready to become all manner of social forms and contents. That readiness is not simply a passive availability. It is an active pressure toward taking-form. The incipency has an appetite for its own eventuation and final characterization. It is an as-yet indeterminate determination to be determined. It is tendency: a determination to be determined with an appetite not only to express itself, but to do so repeatedly, with something happening differently every time, at least in some small way. Far from being asocial, affect is the ongoing force of the social taking evolving form. Affect comes to determinate expression through actually occurring encounters. The evolving social expression of affect hinges on the immediacy of events. The events relay each other, forming event series, tracing lineages of recurrence. Tendencies are brought to serial expression in and through events. What recurs in each event in the lineage is the immediacy of this evolving taking-form. Affect is the ongoing immeditation of the social.

Affect's social expression is in mass psychology. Mass psychology only understands the collective as a molar aggregate of individualities that have melted into an undifferentiated magma. This is understood to occur when the mediation of socializing mechanisms fails. This idea presupposes

a notion of the individual body as the seat of biological impulses that are fundamentally irrational in nature and must be curbed by culture, or sublimated. Affect calls this entire complex of ideas into question. As pure sociality, affect is by nature transindividual. "Transindividual," however, is not synonymous with "collective" in the mass-psychology sense. To the contrary, it expresses itself in movements of correlated differentiation. In itself, it is hyperdifferentiated: mutually including all manner of differentiations in potential. Finally, affect is not psychological. As transindividual, directly relational, and immediately eventful, it overflows on all sides the interiority of the psychological subject. Psychology is a particular mode of expression of affect that individualizes it. Mass psychology is a logical consequence of this individualization: once an individual interiority is constructed, its affective overflowing of its assigned boundaries can only be understood as a de-differentiating melding. The excess of potential that immediates affect, that makes it the force of the social taking form, is mistaken for a magmatic lack of form.

The "autonomy of affect" refers to the separation of the individual from the social. The autonomy of affect refers to the process by which the excess of potential that presses for expression is remaindered after every determinate taking-form, returning to in-form a next expression. The autonomy is of this process. The autonomy of affect is of the turnover of potential on itself, toward the proliferation of ongoing variations on its expression of socially formative force.

Affect pertains to "raw" experience. There is no raw experience. All experience is in-formed by prior takings-form. The manner in which prior takings-form in-form subsequent expressions is always inflected by how potential makes ingress into a situation, with what gradations. The arc of potential's entry into a situation and through it is always modulated on the fly, by very particular mechanisms. Prime among these mechanisms are the "abductions" that texture the landscape of potential through which a coming event will wend its way, in the first flush of its incipency. Abductions are "lived hypotheses." They are thought in the immediacy of their enactment. This means that they are felt as directly as they are thought. They are thinking-feelings of the import of the situation at hand, replete with competing tendencies and alternative paths.

Their enactive nature qualifies them as gestures. Thinking-feelings are speculative gestures: they convoke potential and carry alternatives. As gestures, they do this with style. They do it with technique. There is no expression of affect without technique. It is the nature of affect to be already cultured with technique.

Affect is natural as opposed to cultural. Affect is of the nature of culture. Culture is coextensive with nature. Nature, in the narrower sense of the formative activity of the world outside the human sphere, is always already “technical.” Nature is a self-running autonomy of process replete with its own speculative gestures. What is the trajectory of a body, for example, if not an enactive speculation on future position?

Affect is anything goes. Affect is always conditioned. Its expression, as it comes to be enacted, is always selective. Every situation of encounter imposes constraints on the selection of potential that will eventuate. The expression of affect, far from being anything goes, is an expression of necessity. It is just that it is always also an expression of the necessity of invention: an ongoing validation of the rule of variation: that the world is restless at heart and never sits still. An inventive variation takes constraints as enabling. There would be no creativity of dance without the constraint of gravity. Affect assumes necessity, in the strong sense of taking it on. It takes it on in such a way as to extract from it a surplus-value of creativity.

Affect is feel-good. This idea is a misunderstanding of the Spinozan concept of joy that is often used in affect theory. Joy in the Spinozan sense refers to the intensity of the affective encounter. The intensity of the encounter in turn refers to an augmentation in powers of existence—capacities to feel, act, and perceive—that occurs through the encounter. Understood in this way, joy is not synonymous with positive emotion. It is not “happy,” and it does not connote the attainment of satisfaction. These “hedonic” distinctions simply do not apply to affect. They apply to emotions: the psychological capture of affect for the interiority of a supposedly individual subject. Subjects feel good about themselves emotionally (or not), in the personal refuge of their putative interiority. Affect feels out the world. It is by nature open to adventure, and adventures always involve hardship. Joy in adventure cannot be had without affirming the hardship, in the strong sense of taking it on creatively.

Affect is good. Affect is ethically neutral, in the normal understanding of ethics. That is why it must have its own ethics. As such, affect is neither good nor bad by prevailing ethical criteria. The ethics of affect has no normative value. Affect concerns the revaluation of values. It acknowledges norms only to exceed them, in becoming (including the becoming of the system of norms). This revaluation is desired. Or it is not. Affect is not prescriptive. It is promissory. What it promises is intensity. It is neutral as well in relation to political criteria of judgement. Affect can be fascistic or progressive, reactionary or revolutionary. It all depends on the orientation of the transindividual desires speculatively gestured into motion. The evaluation of affect bears on these tendential orientations. That evaluation has no power of prescription. It is not a judgement that can justify an orientation. It is a diagnosis that maps the promise of an encounter. The diagnosis is an eventful dimension of the speculative gesture. It is included in the enactment. The ethics of affect is therefore experimental. It operates on the level of enactive technique and, like all technique, is honed through trial and error. Given the transindividual nature of affect, the techniques must be effectively, if speculatively, collective.

Affect pertains to the body as opposed to the psychic or mental. This is a misunderstanding that often arises from the distinction between affect and emotion. If emotion is the capture of affect in the interiority of a subject, then, the reasoning goes, affect must be objective in contrast to the subjectivity of emotion. The attention that affect theory has rightly given to neurophysiological phenomena, particularly those attesting to nonconscious dimensions of experience, has reinforced this false opposition by seeming to indicate that affect pertains to the physical functions of the organ of the body that is the brain. Affect does pertain to the body, but the body figures here in an extended sense. The body of affect is extended first in the sense that it is not limited to the brain. It extends throughout the body through the innervations of the flesh. It encompasses the nonconscious “body knowledge” of habits, reflexes, the proprioceptive system, the many functionings of the autonomic nervous system, including the enteric nervous system or “gut brain,” and the myriad of subthreshold experiences, or microperceptions, populating the body’s every move. These form feedback loops that continually

inflect overall experience without themselves rising to consciousness. They in-form thinking-feeling. The body of affect is extended in a more radical sense as well: it includes modes of activity normally designated as belonging to the mind. A habit, for example, is a power to generalize (to produce an operative resemblance between different events, which are always in some way singular). And from the complexity of the feedback between nonconscious and conscious dimensions of experience, new tendencies arise. These constitute enactive speculations on the future potential of activity. Affect theory does not reduce the mind to the body in the narrow, physical sense. It asserts that bodies think as they feel, on a level with their movements. This takes thinking out of the interiority of a psychological subject and puts it directly in the world: in the co-motion of relational encounter. If the Humean definition of the mental is accepted—as that which exceeds the given—then every bodily event is flush with mentality. Every act has a degree of mentality proportionate to its capacity to surprise. That capacity varies across the nature-culture continuum but is never entirely absent, even in the supposedly mechanical workings of “dumb” matter (as deterministic chaos theory has amply demonstrated). Affect requires a far-reaching reevaluation of what a body can do. What is normally called the “mind” is a reduction of the body’s capacities to the sphere of reflective consciousness (which, as neuropsychology has amply demonstrated, is always accompanied by incipient, subthreshold actions “mirroring” what is being thought; this was known in process philosophy and affect theory long before the discovery of mirror neurons, under such names as “reenaction,” “incipient action,” and “reactivation”). Concepts like thinking-feeling, nonsensuous perception, nonconscious experience, and bare activity are designed to deal with the complexity of the body in this processually extended sense. They are ways of articulating how the body always includes the abstract (that which exceeds the given) in its own self-extending definition. Far from suggesting a physicalist reductionism, affect asserts that there is an expansive mental aspect, or what Whitehead calls a “mental pole,” to every bodily event.

Affect is prelinguistic. Every act of language involves an expression of affect. Affect is the infra-conditioning of every determinate activity, including that of language. The preferred prefix for affect is “infra-.” “Pre-” connotes

time sequence. But affect always accompanies, on the parallel track of potential. “Intra-” is also imprecise, connoting as it does space and containment (from *interus*, internal). “Infra-” on the other hand connotes what actively lies below a certain threshold of appearance on an open-ended spectrum (as in “infrared”; from *inferus*, below). The threshold of appearance designates a turning point where the spectrum changes qualitatively in nature, while retaining the continuity of its constitutive gradations (as when infrared shades into the visible region of the spectrum, which is also the qualitative turning point where heat becomes light). There is no antinomy between affect and language. There is accompaniment and becoming, always involving the full spectrum of the graded continuum of experience. The nonverbal grades on the continuum of experience are not in opposition to the verbal registers, any more than infrared is opposed to red. They companion them (as any infrared camera will show). The infra-linguistic registers of experience accompany linguistic expression. At the same time (and this is where the infrared analogy breaks down), they are in-formed by past linguistic expressions, through the complex feedback loops between nonconscious and conscious levels already described. And they in turn in-form linguistic expression with abductive thinking-feelings of the potential toward which speech acts may speculatively gesture, in their powerfully abstract way. The infra-linguistic register of experience in-forms language’s capacity to modulate the mental pole of events. It primes and stokes language’s singular ability to exceed the given (its power to fabulate). As with all the dichotomies that figure in this list of missed affective conceptions, the relation between language and the nonlinguistic must be understood in terms of a graded continuum of potentials punctuated by thresholds past which the mode of activity expressing itself changes qualitatively in nature. Rather than oppositions, affect works with qualitative differentials: the integral mutual inclusion of qualitatively different potentials for expression on the same spectrum. It is always a question of degree. A preverbal human is already infra-linguistic. As is a nonhuman animal, to the degree to which it tends to express the mental pole of activity that language carries to its highest power. There is a mentality in all animal activity, attested to in even the most “lowly” instinctive actions.

Affect negates freedom. This is the unjustified conclusion some commentators have drawn from discussions in affect theory of the famous “missing half-second.” This refers to the neurophysiologist Benjamin Libet’s discovery that there is up to a half-second lag in the conscious dawning of an action from the onset of its physiological stirrings. In the lag, the coming action is moving from its own “readiness potential” to its actual expression: from its in-acting as potential to its acting-out in gesture. What has bothered many people is that the transition is always already on its way nonconsciously, which is taken to mean that it negates freedom of decision. The idea that this nonconscious incipency of action contradicts freedom must be revised in the light of what was said earlier about the mutual inclusion of mental and physical movements in every act’s emergence. The erroneous idea that affect negates freedom results from a refusal to fundamentally rethink the body/mind duality: it construes the nonconscious activity of the body as purely “physical” or “physiological” as opposed to “mental” and equates the physical with “unthinking” mechanism. Affect theory, quite to the contrary, presupposes the mutual inclusion in every event of a physical pole (defined as the tendency of an event to conform to the ordering it inherits from the immediate past) and a mental pole (defined as the tendency to surpass the given, to produce the new and generate surprise). Affect in no way excludes freedom. It does, however, require it to be redefined. The redefinition is necessary because the workings of affect do contradict freedom, if freedom in any way implies the body/mind, physical/mental duality. These dualities are so entrenched in conceptions of freedom that it is difficult for many to bend their thinking-feeling past them. Received ideas about freedom style it as the mental act of an individual psychological subject, or as an unconditioned decisional act of an individual will. This divorces it from the body. But there is no unconditioned decision. And there is no individual, outside its own transindividual becoming, which takes effect through affect (not in reflection). The notion of individual will is sterile: it posits a vacuum of subjective reflection in which volition functions in glorious isolation, unconstrained and unconditioned. This is not freedom. This is a fiction. The nature-culture continuum abhors a vacuum. Freedom is not a property of a subject. There is no pure capacity of decision unmarked by

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necessity. Freedom is an achievement, attained of necessity. It is not exercised, it is invented, through the enabling modulation of constraints. Its invention is situational. Situations are eventful. And events are relational. Subjects don't decide in a vacuum. Events decide, in relation. Freedom pertains not to the individual, but to process. Freedom is the transindividual autonomy of the affective process to generate surprises. It is not without physicality—but it constitutes a triumph of mentality (once again by its affective-processual definition as the capacity to surpass the given and generate the new). Do not protest your freedom. Enact surprise. Speculate that.