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Beyond Personal Feelings and Collective Emotions: Toward a Theory of Social Affect

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Abstract

In the Sociology of Emotion and Affect Studies, affects are usually regarded as an aspect of human beings alone, or of impersonal or collective atmospheres. However, feelings and emotions are only specific cases of affectivity that require subjective inner selves, while the concept of ‘atmospheres’ fails to explain the singularity of each individual case. This article develops a theory of social affect that does not reduce affect to either personal feelings or collective emotions. First, I use a Spinozist understanding of the ‘body’ to conceptualize the receptivity and mutual constitution of bodies, to show how affects do not ‘belong’ to anybody; they are not solely attributable either to the human or to any kind of body alone, but emerge in situations of the encounter and interaction (between bodies). Next I build upon Jean-Marie Guyau’s concept of transmissions to show how we can theorize affect as an emerging transmission between and among bodies. Finally, I demonstrate how we now have a complete conceptual frame for theorizing affect in relation to all bodies in any given social scene, the grand composition of which I call *affectif*.

Keywords

affect, *affectif*, body, Deleuze, encounter, Guyau, interaction, Spinoza, transmission

Social theories often turn on a key conception of affect, such as Émile Durkheim’s *collective sentiment* and *ritual effervescence*, Max Weber’s *charisma* and Georg Simmel’s *fidelity* and *gratitude*, to name a few. The most recent and explicit attempts to grapple with the nature of emotions and affects are in Sociology of Emotion and in the relatively new field of Affect Studies.¹ Both approaches differ in their empirical focus, but share similar concepts and subsequently similar

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conceptual problems. While Sociology of Emotions relates affects exclusively to human bodies, Affect Studies tends to posit the potential social relevance of all sorts of bodies (organic, inorganic, artificial, imaginary, etc.). Thus, the difference in the focus concerns the question of *who or what is the proper body* in relation to which affect is posited. Different theories attribute affect to different bodies or qualities of bodies; but these differences may broadly be categorized in three ways. First, affects and emotions are located within an individual subject or body. Or, second, affects are collective or atmospheric forces that operate external to the body. Third, and finally, affects are the effects of the interactions between and encounters of individual bodies. These three formulations are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

The Sociology of Emotion and Affect Studies have effectively shown the problem associated with the first approach. The psychological notion of innate emotions and affects focuses mainly on the libidinous cathexis of individual subjects. While psychology does not completely ignore the role of external influences in the shaping of psychic experiences (see for instance, Freud's [1989 (1915)] idea of *sublimation* and Winnicott's [1971] concept of *transitional objects*), such theories nonetheless tend to be one-dimensional since they primarily focus on the psychic reality of an individual human, and in doing so overlook other, non-human bodies, and thus obscure the variety of social bodies; also, they do not adequately theorize the processual aspects of encounters and interactions between myriad bodies.

Authors of the Sociology of Emotions and Affect Studies oppose this individualistic approach by relying either on structuralist models that explain emotions in terms of forces or processes external to the individual, or on interactionist approaches that posit affects as the effects of dynamic encounters between bodies. Emotions may be defined as occurrences in human *interactions* (see for example Hochschild, 1979; Kemper, 1978; Thoits, 1989) that produce, shape or channel said interactions, or as shared *collective feelings* and *common moods* leading to the *mutual entrainment* of individuals, which subsequently determines their interactions and therefore creates emotions in individuals (Ahmed, 2004; Collins, 2004).

In opposition to Affect Studies, however, Sociology of Emotion solely focuses on human bodies. By excluding a considerable variety of social bodies, it suffers from shortcomings similar to the psychological approaches it attempts to amend. Moreover, the theories prevalent in the Sociology of Emotion assume a kind of universal human affectability that differs only with respect to the attentiveness of each individual, and therefore fail to account for the effects of different environments (Collins, 2004). Yet it is important to not fall back into the notion of human exclusivity because the effects stemming from interactions with all other bodies present, human and non-human, are not merely imaginary

but are, in fact real. Otherwise we would have to treat real ontological effects that concern a veritable portion of social life as mere illusions, errors or misunderstandings. For instance, with regard to religious rituals, it is quite obvious that the particular (sacred) location and all elements involved – buildings and artifacts such as relics, totems and symbols – play a decisive role in the emerging affect. If their role were merely imaginary (a human phantasm) instead of ontological it would not make a difference whether a church was richly decorated or simply an empty bunker.

The more recently established field of Affect Studies goes some way toward redressing the inadequacies of the Sociology of Emotion. Thus, affects are often related to dynamic relations of bodies and their *encounters* out of which affects emerge (Seighworth and Gregg, 2010). Affect Studies captures the situational nature of affect in conceptualizing affects, as *emerging* at the moment when bodies meet, *affecting* the bodies involved in the encounter, and *marking the transformation/s* of the bodies. However, the theories are still bedevilled by the following conceptual problem: how can an affect be simultaneously defined as an effect that only emerges from the encounter between bodies, and *also* as a force external to these bodies? In other words, where does affect *begin*? While this ambivalence or seeming inconsistency is well known and has been reflected upon in both fields (e.g. Gregg, 2010: 49; Turner and Stets, 2005: 78), a conceptual solution is still missing (Anderson, 2009).

Various attempts have been made to bridge the theoretical gap between innate emotions on the one hand and environmental influences on the other. One is the concept of *affective atmospheres* that surround and impinge upon bodies (Böhme, 1995; Bredekamp, 2010; Brennan, 2004). Teresa Brennan is one of the more sophisticated exponents of the theory, and her theory may be taken as an exemplar of these approaches. She holds that ‘the “atmosphere” or the environment literally gets into the individual’ (2004: 1). These atmospheres could be described as hormone or pheromone landscapes that, according to Brennan, create similar affects in each body moving within them. In turn, this makes the individual body a rather passive object. Brennan’s theory of affective atmospheres does not explain why and how different bodies are affected in different ways by the same atmosphere. This problem is not limited to questions of pheromone or hormone exposure but is a fundamental conceptual problem concerning the notion of ‘atmospheres’ itself. In the first place, pheromone exposure in fact does not create similar outcomes in each individual but requires a rather fine attunement in order to trigger a bodily reaction. Furthermore, the notion of an atmosphere that is supposed to create a collective affect leaves many social phenomena unexplained. For instance, why do some social members resonate with the religious aura in churches or in sacred places while others remain unaffected, or why do some resonate

with stock-market fevers while others produce strong counter-reactions in an identical context? Brennan herself admits the deterministic implications and problems of her concept of 'atmospheres', observing that 'even when a strong affect has most people in its collective grip, there are exceptions'; there is always 'the one who holds out against a common affect' (2004: 11). Brennan explains the exceptions by the individuals' 'ability to distance or detach' themselves, their power of 'self-possession' (2004: 11). Unfortunately, this theoretical step simply turns the argument around, reducing the source of affective difference to individual difference again – the very thing that Brennan's theory of affective atmospheres tries to sidestep or overcome.

Moreover, reducing it to individual 'self-possession' is not an adequate explanation. The main problem of the concept of atmospheric transmission of affect seems to be its inability to account for the active role of *all the bodies that are present*: either a body becomes entrained (in the same way, and to like effect) by an atmospheric affect, or it needs to resist the atmosphere by a process of self-containment. Since the atmosphere (e.g. in a religious location) is uniform, it is clearly not so much a difference in the individual's 'focus of attention' (Collins, 2004: 79) but rather a difference in the receptivity of the particular body involved (Kwek, 2012) – not every individual body can be affected in the same way; there is clearly a difference in the *affective configuration of the participant*.

This article demonstrates how the precise configuration of affect comes more clearly into view by addressing two conceptual premises: first, the nature of the composition of bodies, and the role of affect in their constitution; and, second, the nature of affect transmission in bodily interactions. This will allow us to address the problems that continue to plague Affect Studies as well as the Sociology of Emotion, namely, the problems of the origin of affect on the one hand and the question of the relation between milieu and individual on the other. First, we suggest disaggregating and de-stabilizing the notion of the individual or subject of affect, or rather acknowledging the continual fluxes in bodily composition and constitution, which arise in part from an inherent receptivity of bodies. A fluid and expanded conceptual field of bodily existence goes hand in hand with the reconceptualization of the transmission of affects between bodies. The transmission of affect is no simple influence or impingement of an external force upon a human body, but rather describes the different affective frequencies modulating the diverse ways in which various types of bodies interact (through tactile, olfactory, gustatory, electrical, etc., modes).

To conceptualize the fluidity of bodily composition, the receptivity of bodies, I begin with an abstract and general notion of the body derived from Benedict de Spinoza's philosophy. His conception of the body allows for the incorporation of myriad bodily forms, both human and non-human, that continuously affect and are affected by one another;

thus, the affective environment is constituted by a changing scene or flux of bodily presences.²

Conceptualizing bodies as fluid compositions also bars us from assuming that every human body reacts or is affected the same way, irrespective of circumstance, temporal experience, or variations across individuals. Affects not only vary according to time and circumstance – that is, they are historically and culturally different – each affect is also never solely a part of a body to begin with. It is always a part of an encounter. This is why an affect can never be said to be clearly human nor non-human or artificial – for instance, a particular affect might be related to the encounter with an animal or an object rather than our inner libidinous structure. In this context, Spinoza's geometrical method of treating each body equally enables us to account for the role of non-human bodies and to evade an anthropological hierarchization. Human bodies are not the main factor in the emergence of affects. They are just one element among many others. Similar to the concept of distributed agency, we should rather think of affects as *distributed affects*.

Furthermore, there is no binary between a bodiless atmosphere and body. (If used at all, an atmosphere has to be understood as the entirety of all bodies present.) In the picture–observer relation, for instance, the affect cannot be attributed to either side: it is neither produced by the picture as an 'atmosphere', nor is it the emotional cathexis of the observer. Rather, observer and picture together constitute *affect-blocs* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994 [1991]: 164). In order to avoid the conceptual misunderstandings involved in the term *atmosphere* but also the rather static undertones in Deleuze and Guattari's *bloc*, I suggest the term *affectif* as the entirety of all heterogeneous bodies involved in the emergence of an affect.

Next, in order to clarify different types of encounters among bodies, I show how an extension of Jean-Marie Guyau's³ aesthetic theory of the *various forms of affective interactions* might contribute in the analysis of social interactions. According to Guyau, *interactions* of all kinds of living beings are important, including artifacts and architecture. Thus, instead of defining interactions mainly as languages, symbols or human sensibility, we should rather account for all kinds of encounters, even those that involve artificial and material bodies. For Guyau, interactions are not predominantly linguistic or symbolic but are determined by the affective capabilities of the encountering bodies. Consequently, since 'emotion' usually refers to particular human configurations, I suggest using 'affect' as a general term that defines relations among all kinds of bodies, of which emotion is but one particular form. I will argue that Guyau's theory of the different forms of affective interactions provides a helpful conceptual frame for the existing analyses of Affect Studies. Thus, all the various forms of affective interactions discussed in affect theories – intensive (Massumi, 1995), non-cognitive (Thrift, 2000), cognitive

(Connolly, 2002), olfactory (Brennan, 2004), electrical (Bennett, 2005), psychological (Blackman, 2008), acoustic (Henriques, 2010), etc. – are then neither contradictions nor a sign of a discipline that assembles completely unrelated phenomena under the same name. Instead they might be understood as different forms of affective interactions/transmissions.

The Emergence of Affects during the Encounter of Bodies

Affect Studies often derives its notion of the body from Benedict de Spinoza (via Gilles Deleuze). Even though Spinoza's *Ethics* (1994 [1677]) is primarily concerned with the human body, his concept of bodies refers to all kinds of bodies, for 'whatever we have said of the idea of the human body must also be said of the idea of any thing' (E2p13s). Spinoza does not introduce a hierarchical model (as for instance in the anthropocentric models of Sociology of Emotions), but rather differentiates bodies corresponding to a *geometrical order*, in which everything is treated equally. Spinoza's general definition of bodies states that each body has to be taken as a complex body, consisting of various simpler bodies, which in turn are also composed from more simple bodies, ad infinitum. This raises the question: what turns a collection of simple bodies into a complex body? Spinoza defines a body by its affective capability (*potentia*) and calls this particular power *affectus*.⁴ Now, in the *Ethics* it says:

By affect [*affectum*] I understand affections [*affectiones*] of the body by which the body's power [*potentia*] of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of affections. (E3d3)⁵

Thus, affects are not just 'produced' by bodies, they *define and ceaselessly constitute and reconstitute* the nature of a body. Bodies are defined by their capability to affect or to be affected, by their power to conjoin other bodies or to split up, to deflect influences or to be led by them. A composite body emerges as an individual body at the moment it becomes affectable by outside influences or has an impact on other things as an individual body (by its 'power of acting'). This in turn points to the continuous mutual determination of bodies and the effects of their encounters, for each encounter results in a change of the body's capabilities – a change of the powers of acting and perceiving. *Affectio* (often translated as the English 'affection') is the trace of one body's effect upon another; *affectio* is the index of (changing) affective capabilities.

Certain affections are at the same time modal states of a body (E1d5). For this reason, what general linguistic usage calls a body – its spatial-structural aspect – is actually just a *single* affection or *one* mode of this body (E1p25c). A body is not simply identical to one of its modes but has

virtually infinite modes – simultaneously. Yet it is not helpful to single out one mode of the body for another (declaring it to be excluded, hegemonic or historical), but rather to insist on the virtual co-presence and simultaneity of multiple bodily and affective modes through which we move. Analyses in Affect Studies are not foreign to this conception of body-as-being-affected, and – whether independently or *pace* Spinoza – they have shown that actual modes of bodies are always the results of the encounter with other bodies: for instance, the encounter with certain technologies might produce a ‘biomediated body’ (Clough, 2008: 2). The simultaneous presence of different bodily modes can also be seen in consumerist practices that, according to Mike Featherstone, seemingly aim at the production of a body-image – a façade or a portrait – but turn out to be most effective if an intensive body emerges, a body that is not so much seen as it is *felt* (Featherstone, 2010: 194) – felt *across distances*, as we will later say with Guyau.

Therefore, affects are deeply constitutive of bodies; bodily persistence and mutability involves affect, and affect in turn is the modulation of bodies. I will use *affectif* to refer to particular concatenations of bodies and affects. Spinoza’s philosophy of intercorporeality shows us that affect is always *social* in nature. Each affect always trails behind a train of other affects, and is in turn followed by infinitely many more others. Every affect is simultaneously of at least two bodies. The concept of the *affectif* is meant to capture this social and heteronomous quality of affect and affective bodies.

Though inspired by Michel Foucault’s term *dispositif*, *affectif* is essentially a neologism. We will explain the similarities along the three definitions of *dispositif* Foucault has given in ‘The Confession of the Flesh’. With the help of this term, Foucault tries to identify the source of political and social power, which he does not link to a single leader or a group of leaders but defines as an ‘ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions’ (Foucault, 1980: 194). Because we are interested in the source of affects instead of power, we are not focusing on the content of Foucault’s definition but on its formal construction. First, as in *dispositif* the term *affectif* aims at the designation of a ‘thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble of elements’. Affects arise from an *affectif* the way power arises from a *dispositif*. Both emerge from an assemblage of heterogeneous elements instead of being ‘located at – or emanating from – a given point’ (1980: 198), for example from a subject or a human body. Thus, instead of reducing our focus to the human body and its emotions, we have to account for all the relevant elements involved. Second, the notion of an *affectif* also describes ‘the nature of the connection that can exist between these heterogeneous elements’ (1980: 194). Regarding these connections, both *dispositif* and *affectif* are attempts to avoid the reductionism of

(human) communication through language and symbolisms. They take into account what Foucault calls 'the said as much as the unsaid' (1980: 194). We call these connections *affective interactions* out of which *affects* (and effects) emerge. Here, the notion of interaction is not limited to language and communication but describes the whole range of social life. Therefore, one of the main points of a theory of affect is to broaden the notion of social interactions. Third, an *affectif* also stands for a historical formation in so far as the affective interactions that describe the relations of its elements are not always the same. Evidently, those interactions are historically and culturally relative; so much so that 'un-timely' or un-cultural interactive forms might appear as disorderly or pathological (for instance, in the case of hearing voices, etc.). Furthermore, affective interactions are related to the affectability of the elements and bodies involved: some bodies are more affectable than others, which means not all can hear the voices or misunderstand noises as voices, etc. Obviously, the cultural and historical variations of individual affectabilities and affective interactions are correlative to each other, simply because each interaction requires particular receptive and interactive capabilities of a body and vice versa.

In opposition to Foucault, the term *affectif* does not contain the bureaucratic aspect of the term *dispositif* as in apparatus or administrative machine, and also evades his notions of strategic power and the critical undertones implied. It merely borrows the logical framework without necessarily subscribing to Foucault's concepts and contents.

At this point, we are able to disentangle a triadic theory of affect, which consists of, first, continuous intensive changes in the capabilities of a body – capabilities for affecting (actively) and being affected (receptively); second, the resulting bodily states and modes (affections); and, third, the *affectif*, the entirety of all elements involved in a particular situation, out of which affects emerge.

If every body is always the result of dynamic encounters with other bodies, then it becomes crucial to understand the ways in which bodies affect each other, how they interact. Spinoza's theory remains abstract and focuses primarily on human encounters. However, as we have argued, a theory of social affect cannot limit itself to interactions of human individuals and the exchange of language and symbols, etc., but must take into view the encounter of a variety of different bodies with varying bodily capabilities.

From Transmission of Affect to Affective Transmission

How do affects pass between or among such bodies? As we have seen, even as affects are described as emerging from the encounters between bodies, they are at the same time very often conceptualized as determining influences. However, an affect is never independent of the bodies

it affects. It also depends on the *capability that the bodies possess for allowing themselves to be affected by other bodies*.

Affective transmission does not refer to a transmitting ‘atmosphere’ that is independent of the bodies involved. The shift from the *inner* body as the source of affects to the assemblage of heterogeneous elements implies that transmissions vary depending on the composition of each assemblage. Thus, transmission refers to the particular channels, frequencies, timbres and tonalities in the process of mutual affecting by those bodies. Consequentially, the frequency range might in principle be infinite, always depending on the variety of bodies present and their specific historical and cultural sensibilities and capabilities. This concerns the question of the affective interactions of social bodies: language, symbols, touch, smell, indirect nervous transmissions, electricity, etc. Similarly, Brian Massumi (1995: 87) defines Affect Studies by its attempt to expand the conceptual range of affective interactions beyond the common scope of a social theory that is mainly interested in language, symbols, etc. So, Affect Studies is interested in a great variety of different affective interactions and forms of affective encounter – intensive, non-cognitive, cognitive, olfactory, electrical, psychological, acoustic and so forth. These different affective interactions describe specific relations of specific bodies within the infinity of social bodies and their respective affective capabilities. Most importantly, these are not limited to human sensibility. (They could also involve, for instance, interactions of electrons [Bennett, 2005].)

However, theorists of affect have overlooked Jean-Marie Guyau’s early attempt (1887) to conceptualize a virtually infinite range of *affective interactions*. Guyau’s theory offers a general conceptual frame for assembling all types of *affective interactions* by introducing, at an abstract and general level, some of the types of affective interactions that Affect Studies is currently focusing on, for instance *intensity*, *electricity*, *psychological suggestion*. More importantly, his concepts emphasize the processual, active, transitive, transitional and, above all, inter-corporeal nature of affect.

The Various Forms of Affective Interactions

In his *L’Art au point de vue sociologique*,⁶ Jean-Marie Guyau is mainly interested in the subject of art and the social character of aesthetic affects. For him, art is ‘*par excellence* a phenomenon of sociability because it is based entirely on the laws of sympathy and the transmission of affects’ (1887: 383). Works of art are not simply the result of an individual genius but rather media for affective interactions. They thereby become media of social inclusion. As a result, Guyau’s account not only presents a counter-concept to the notion of *l’art pour l’art* but indirectly offers an alternative to social theories that understand society as an attempt to

equilibrate egoistic and altruistic tendencies. Thus, it is unfortunate that Guyau limits his theory to art because, as James Sully (1890: 283) already noted one year after its publication, art is not the only interactive agency. It might be argued that Guyau illustrates and explains his concept of affect transmission mainly by examples from the human realm, making it unsuitable for a general theory of affectivity that focuses on a greater variety of bodies. However, his work, on a theoretical level, is helpful to the field of Affect Studies. This is especially apparent with Guyau's definition of art as that capability 'to produce or to simulate movement and action and by that to provoke in us sympathetic movements and germs of actions' (1887: 20). This definition is so abstract that it easily applies to a greater range of social phenomena. What follows is my attempt to extend and apply Guyau's theory to a general theory of affect.

Yet this expansion of Guyau's theory is not unwarranted. Like Spinoza, Guyau operates with a very general notion of the *body*. This becomes especially apparent in his comments on architecture:

a building that is made for life is itself a living body, with its openings to the outside, with its windows that are like eyes, its doors that are like mouths, finally with everything that characterizes the coming and going of living beings . . . Architecture still exhibits a familial and social character; even the temple remains a mysterious house, adapted to superhuman life, ready to welcome its god and to enter into society with him. (1887: 21)⁷

Not only does a house exhibit certain affective capabilities, these are moreover related to non-human bodies, even superhuman bodies. The affects of this architectural body can only be explained, according to Guyau, by the encounter and interaction of at least three bodies: the house, human social members and a god. What applies to the concept of the body also applies to his general understanding of affect that is not limited to the human real: 'It is as difficult to limit a moral, aesthetic or other affect to a living body, as it is to limit [affect] to heat or electricity' (1887: xlii).

Guyau based his theory on a new concept that emerged in the 19th century – the concept of *transmission*. However, his notion of transmission differs decisively from theories of affect that we discussed above. He sees it as a solution to the problem of 'the social side of the human individual, and of the living being in general' (1887: xli). When positing causal relations between the individual and the social or collective, many social and psychological theories tend to begin from one side of the relation: either the social is explained by the motives of particular individuals (individualistic approach), or the individual is nothing but a structural knot within the social (structural approach). The theoretical design is congruent in both cases and the real argument is ultimately

about which is the determined and which the determining element: either the motives and negotiating skills of individuals determine the system or individual affects and thought patterns are an expression of social atmospheres and moods. Guyau does not begin from either the individual or the social; he does not begin solely from one side, as psychologizing or sociologizing approaches would do. He is not interested in the question of who determines whom and how, but rather, asks about the nature of the *inter-passage*, the *in-between*, the *transmission* that emerges in moments of interaction. Moreover, and similar to what Massumi says regarding Affect Theories today, Guyau's theory of interaction is not restricted to languages or symbols, but accounts for transmissions and exchanges in a much more general sense. Such a generalized and abstract model has the advantage of accounting for the biggest possible spectrum of interactive forms in the beginning, without having to declare one, for example language, the single most important kind, and then subordinating everything else to this form. In contrast to other affect theories, Guyau conceptualizes media of interaction as multiple movements of mutual affection and sympathies. These conceptually involve all kinds of possible perceptive and emitting media. Here, a medium is not just defined as a thing in between, which (like a letter) conveys something, such as information, from one side to the other, from a sender to a receiver. Rather, any transmitting medium is composed of, is no more than, the rhythms and frequencies that interacting bodies occupy and assume.

For Guyau transmission *does not belong* to either side – neither to an 'atmosphere' or individual, nor to a sender or receiver. It is not a one-directional operation but rather a phenomenon of between-ness, an *effect* that *emerges* in the encounter of social bodies and, by that, it is the *production of an affect*.⁸ Guyau explains the emergence of affect with an illustration of tactile interactions: 'The touch of two living beings is very similar to the pressing of an electric button that hurls two currents against each other' (1887: 3). Thus, the affect is only sufficiently explained by the encounter of currents and flows that are deployed at the moment of touch but not by an electric atmosphere or an innate force. Affective interactions are not limited to touch but comprise all kinds of encounters ranging from electromagnetic induction to 'sympathy' among physical as well as social bodies. However, 'sympathetic' interactions are not to be mistaken for amicable and benevolent social relations but have to be understood by the actual meaning of *sympathy* in ancient Greek – being-co-affected.⁹ *Syn*(chronized)*pathos* is the situation in which all present bodies interact within the same affective frequency. Thus, sympathy is similar to concepts of *suggestion* and *imitation*.¹⁰ For example, novelty in artistic creation cannot simply be explained by the genius of an artist, but by a 'public which repeats in itself states of mind, sentiments, emotions, thoughts through sympathy' (1887: 43). Thus, the ingenious

invention emerges out of the suggestion of the artist and its imitation by the members of a society, who, by their enthusiasm, make it an *affective* invention.¹¹

Imitation is . . . a phenomenon of sympathy, of sociability; the artistic genius itself is a sympathetic and social instinct carried to its extreme, which, after being fulfilled in a fictitious area, provokes, through imitation, a real evolution of sympathy and general sociability in others. (1887: 44)

However, such encounters do not generate predictable or comparable outcomes since the configuration of every particular body differs, and each encounter depends on the specific bodies involved:

Admiration is not as passive as pure and simple sensation. A work of art is all the more admirable the more personal emotions and ideas it evokes in us, the more *suggestive* it is But not all minds are [equally] susceptible to *resonating* in the same degree in contact with a work of art, to experiencing the entirety of affects which it can furnish. (1887: 48)

In order to trigger and produce an affect interacting bodies need to be attuned to the same interactive frequency: ‘Ultimately, there is nothing other than sensations of movement, and a more or less elementary *imitation* of a perceived movement can be seen in each sensation of movement’ (1887: 5). Guyau describes explicitly five kinds of affective interactions, four of which are direct – (1) haptic, (2) olfactory, (3) aesthetic (acoustic and visual), (4) ‘the unconscious transmission at a distance through nervous currents’ – and one of which is indirect, and related to signs – (5) expressions (1887: 1). These forms of interactions are not absolutely fixed and mutually impenetrable: they might transversally cross, for instance when visual transmissions lead to haptic affections (e.g. shivers running down our spine while watching a movie). The differences of these transmissions are defined by Guyau by their density, so that we see a decrease in the density of the transmitting medium when we go from haptic and olfactory transmissions to visual and acoustic ones. Thus, every transmission is a frequency, a differently dense fold in a continuous affective field.

According to Guyau – and contrary to intuitive thought – the densest type of contact is not represented by touch or direct bodily contact, but by the ‘transmission of nervous vibrations and mental states’ (1887: 2). In Guyau’s scheme of decreasing density the ‘consistent transmission of nervous vibrations and mental states’ is followed by tactile and haptic transmission, which exhibit direct bodily contact (transmission of

exterior bodily sensations), and then by olfactory transmission. Finally, light and air represent the most distanced of direct transmissions:

[A] gentle vibration like a ray, or the sound wave that it produces, an excitation, which is able to stop at isolated fibres without setting the entire mass of optic and acoustic nerves in motion, is enough to provoke a perceptible change of state in these senses. (1887: 5)

The fact that the ‘transmission of nervous mental states’, which could be taken as a rather ethereal interaction, is supposed to be the densest within the affective continuum, is explained by the fact that it refers to something even more intense than a transmission through the boundaries of the body (membranes, skins, etc.). It refers in fact to communication of interior bodily sensations, for example pain or fever, where, the body is not simply touched on the outside but is *affected from within*. It refers to a kind of psychic parallelism whereby individual bodies that are mutually attuned to one another communicate affects (e.g. pain) and perceive them simultaneously – a *com-passion*¹² at a distance. Again, Guyau calls this ‘sympathetic vibrations’ or ‘suggestions and mutual obligations’. This echoes the concept of inter-‘action at a distance’ that is a well established concept in many disciplines, for instance in physics where it is used in the concept of *quantum entanglement*. This final kind of transmission, the transmission of com-passion, may also help explain the phenomenon of collective trauma, which Lisa Blackman describes as the ‘intimate touch’ of ‘shared traumatic affects that co-emerge between subjects’ (2010: 165). I will now illustrate how we may deploy this theoretical framework with an example of the transmissions of affect in the stock-market.

Affective Encounters over the Stock-Market Ticker

The following discussion draws primarily from Urs Stäheli’s account of the *stock-market ticker* as an integrative medium for human affects. In my theoretical reconstruction, I show how we can supplement analyses of affect, first, by bringing into theoretical consideration non-human bodies and, second, by elaborating on the different modes of transmission between social bodies. While the erratic trading movements of stock-markets may be interpreted as a mutual attunement of collective desires and passions, leading to irrational and risky decisions by the traders, Urs Stäheli’s analysis shows that affects are not simply related to the desire for future profits but also to the specific type of interaction *through* the *communication* of stock-market information (e.g. through stock-market tickers). In this context, the transmitting machine – the stock-market ticker – is not only a tool for the transmission of affect but is itself a body that interacts with its users.

Stäheli's analysis is peculiar insofar as he refuses a functional interpretation when it seems especially evident and appropriate. Who wouldn't find it plausible to define a stock ticker as medium for the transmission/carriage of information and nothing else? That is what it is built for and that is what it does: a stock ticker communicates current stock-market quotations and nothing else. However, a theory of affect will also observe that often, the communicative value is bypassed by its users and receivers for *something else*: the ticker 'also communicates itself and subsequently makes this the dominant information' (Stäheli, 2004: 261).¹³ The ticker itself is a body with affective capabilities beyond the transmission of information. For: 'The distributing medium, used for the transmission of information, disseminates its peculiar effect even before the transmitted information – quotation – can be understood' (2004: 255). With such an interpretation Stäheli identifies the deficiencies of many theories of communication that neglect the ontological effects that are produced, effects which communication itself exhibits and which need to be analysed.

Once we understand the ticker as a body, we are able to analyse all the features of its affective interactions. Most striking in this respect is the phenomenon of *speed*, which, according to Stäheli, generates the most attention. At first glance, speed does not seem to be a mode of interaction itself but a particular feature of interactive forms (fast or slow). However, with Brian Massumi we can call speed an *intensive interaction* that results in particular affects. This is clearly demonstrated in Stäheli's example. First, speed is the *celerity* of the affecting body – in this case, the stock-ticker. Contemporary witnesses report on the 'uncanny swiftness' of the transmission of stock-market information, in contrast to a former slowness. The transmission of market quotations used to be confined to stock-market buildings (in New York City and Philadelphia). It was virtually impossible for outsiders to know the current prices. But slowness of transmission also continued 'in the blocked hallways' and the roads outside of these buildings. The difference in the speed of interaction is not a mere matter of degree – as if the main difference is to be found in the faster arrival of stock-market information – but a veritable qualitative change. The speed of stock-tickers is a *celerity* precisely because it is continuous: for the first time, market prices can be followed on an 'endless tape' (2004: 252), a continuity that thereby defines this 'new' speed in contrast to the previous slowness, the asynchronous and discontinuous distribution of market quotations. Furthermore, speed also refers to *desire* on the side of the affected body, to the desire to be a part of this feverish dream: 'the stock-market became a phenomenon, to be experienced by outsiders almost immediately, on which not just newspapers reported with a one-day delay (and under permanent suspicion of manipulation!), but which happened virtually simultaneously on various locations of the ticker' (2004: 251). Thus, the difference in speed changes

the possible realm of mutually affecting bodies, and consequently the very nature of affective interaction in this field of human experience.

We can list even more affective interactions with the ticker, such as *acoustic affects*. The question of noise depends on the way a body affects other bodies – ‘the ceaseless hammering of the ticker’ (2004: 255), its particular ‘noisiness’ or ‘auto-noise’¹⁴ – and the way these other bodies allow themselves to be affected – their ‘excitement’ and the ‘ticker fever’ they develop (2004: 256).¹⁵ As we saw earlier in the discussion of Guyau, every type of affective interaction can be transversally crossed. For instance, acoustic interactions also produce *intensive interactions*: ‘The ticker unfolds a power that overshadows every other form of communication – it is of such attractiveness that all other activities become neglected, and full attention is turned towards itself’ (2004: 258). The ‘excitement’ and ‘fever’ induced by the stock-market bear out Brian Massumi’s definition of affect as *intensive* forms of affective encounter, and illustrate Guyau’s ‘unconscious transmission at a distance through nervous currents’.

Space does not permit further elaboration of this case. I want to conclude this illustration by noting that we can discern more affective forms in the interactions of and with stock-market tickers beyond the ones I have enumerated. For instance, there are *electric interactions* in the telephonic transmission, as described by Jane Bennett (2005) (in relation to the power grid), *visual interactions* with computer screen display, analysed by Karin Knorr Cetina and Urs Bruegger (2000), and the *emotive interactions* of living beings (in Vinciane Despret’s [2004] reformulation of animal–human interaction).

Even the case of the stock-market ticker confronts us with a seemingly infinite amount of affective interactions, most of which still escape the attention of mainstream sociology. However, interactionist approaches in the Sociology of Emotion and multi-body concepts in Affect Studies have begun assembling a great variety of case studies that point in this theoretical direction.

Conclusion

I have shown how, by combining Spinoza’s theory of the body with Guyau’s theory of affective interactions, we can bring a coherent and fine-grained theoretical framework to bear upon the burgeoning case studies in Affect Studies and Sociology of Emotions. Spinoza’s conceptualization of the body is abstract enough to overcome the shortcomings of different kinds of reductionism (e.g. of human bodies), while Guyau’s theory enables us to focus on interrelations of bodies without having to resort to vague concepts such as *atmosphere* and *mood* that rather seem to paper over conceptual problems instead of resolving them. The theory of social affect suggested here differs from existing ones insofar as it does not

directly locate affects within sensual bodies or in affective atmospheres, but instead sees them as the result of (social!) encounters (of various bodies) – they emerge in transmissions, interactions, encounters. Then, affects are situational phenomena, irreducible to the individuals among whom they circulate or to ‘atmospheres’ through which bodies move. The body is relevant insofar as the emerging affect corresponds to the continuous intensive changes in the capacities of a body. In contrast, the remaining trace of an affective event is understood to be affection or the mode of a body (the trace that signifies the previous presence and interchange with other bodies). Conceptually, no body should, according to Spinoza’s geometrical method, be treated any differently than any other body. An *affectif* consists of all relevant social bodies and their differentiated interactions (haptic, olfactory, aesthetic, psychic, semiotic, neurological, electrical, intensive, etc.). This theory has the advantage of opening up rather than closing the range of empirical social research; it allows, nay encourages, us to take environmental factors into account, as preceding prevailing anthropocentric approaches have seldom done.

Notes

1. This can be seen in a slew of recent publications. For an overview of the recent research situation in the Sociology of Emotion see for example: Greco and Stenner (2008) and Turner and Stets (2005), for Affect Studies see for example the special issue on affect of *Body & Society* (16(1), March 2010) and Gregg (2010).
2. It is certainly safe to say that to regard non-human bodies as relevant and active social elements – as *socii*, as social companions – is relatively new in social theories. In sociology especially, defining the *socius* as an essentially human companion was, for the most part, never questioned. And even those authors who point out, for instance, that the presence of plants in the workplace actually does make a difference are more interested in the increase of human productivity rather than in the analyses of non-human affects (Larsen et al., 1998). Even though today a great number of scholars work on concepts that insist on the importance and relevance of non-human actors (*pace* Bruno Latour, Karin Knorr Cetina, Jane Bennett et al.) this remains a minor interest within the general field.
3. ‘[T]he Spinoza of France’ (Kapteyn, 1898: xii).
4. On the relation of power and affect see Kwek (2012).
5. The indifferent treatment of affect, feeling and emotion in many interpretations of Spinoza has its roots in the imprecise translation of this famous quote. For instance, Nigel Thrift (2004: 62) translates *affectus* as ‘emotion’ and *affectiones* as ‘modifications’. Whereas ‘modification’ is a very loose translation of *affectiones*, ‘emotion’ has even in Latin a completely different meaning. ‘Emotion’ implies a sense of outward movement, since ‘emotion’ has its root in the Latin *emovere*, where *e-*, a variant of *ex-* refers to out.
6. ‘Art from a sociological perspective’ – an English translation of this text is not available. The following quotes are my translations. The pages refer to the original text in French. For an English introduction to the work of

Jean Marie Guyau see James Sully's early review from 1890 and Frank Harding's introduction from 1973, which focuses on *L'Art au point de vue sociologique* in chapter 3. For a historical contextualization that shows the influence of Guyau's work on authors such as Nietzsche, Bergson, Durkheim, Simmel, Kropotkin, Tarde, James, Lukács, Ortega y Gasset, etc., see Fidler (1994).

7. With regard to the role of architectural affects, see Heike Delitz (2010).
8. Translating the French *émotion* as 'affect' became necessary in order to avoid misunderstandings. For Guyau, *émotion* does not refer to personal feelings but to mutual affections. For 'feelings' he generally uses the term *sentiment*.
9. *συν* ('together') and *πάσχω* ('compassion' or 'suffering', in the sense of being-co-affected).
10. Guyau explicitly refers to Gabriel Tarde's laws of imitation, and he praises the latter for the 'originality of his views and subtlety of his mind' (Guyau, 1887: 43). Guyau does not point to a particular publication but, since *Laws of Imitation* was not published until 1890, he probably refers to the concept of imitation in Tarde's *La Criminalité comparée* (1886). According to Guyau, Tarde differentiates two fundamental kinds of movement: *imitation* and *innovation*. In the law of imitation, each aspect of the world follows its specific form of imitation: anorganic imitation can be described by a movement of undulation, which might be defined best by a linear causality of elements within a flow. In contrast, organic imitation is defined by the act of generation, which introduces little divergences in each new round. Each generation creates intervals within movements of undulations. So organic imitation actually includes divergences as well as the linear undulations in which they unfold. Strictly speaking, acts of generating also follow wavelike motions 'which propagate and repeat themselves along their own lines' (1887). These divergences allow for distinct lines of undulation which are proper to the organic, and which thereby constitute the principle of novelty within the anorganic world. Here, undulations are not just perpetuated by mechanistic determination, but change and follow new lines in every generation.

A similar situation can also be found at the level of the social world, whose specific form of imitation is defined by the undulations that are transmitted 'from one being to the other through sympathy' (Guyau, 1887). In this sphere, novelty is ascribed to genius, which refers neither to a lonely hero who creates something *ex nihilo* simply by his extraordinarily intelligence and creativity, nor to a social myth which makes everything novel depend entirely on the discourse of genius. Rather, genius is the concrete and individual case of the principle of contingent novelty that results from random divergences within organic undulations. Genius is:

an accidental modification of the faculties and their organs in a sense which is favorable for the novelty and the invention of new things; once it has occurred, this felicitous accident does not lead to a hereditary or physical transmission but introduces new types into the world of ideas or sentiments. (Guyau, 1887: 31)

11. Society and genius therefore form a triad of (1) the actuality of social milieu, out of which an ingenious novelty emerges, (2) the virtuality of the ingenious idea or concept and (3) the fabulation of the companions or the people which signifies the actualization of the virtual idea.
12. The term 'passion', derived from the Latin *passio*, is also commonly used in modern philosophy (in Spinoza's *Ethics* or David Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature* for instance) to signify an affect undergone or experienced.
13. Here, as in all following cases, my translation. Page numbers refer to the German original.
14. In this context, Stäheli (2003) also wrote a history of stock-market communication as a history of various forms of noise.
15. A vivid depiction of stock-market fever in general, and the acoustics of its affectivity, may be seen in Michelangelo Antonioni's film, *L'Eclisse*.

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