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**Article (Accepted version)  
(Refereed)**

**Original citation:**

Holzberg, Billy (2018) *The multiple lives of affect: a case study of commercial surrogacy*. [Body and Society](#). ISSN 1357-034X

DOI: [10.1177/1357034X18799177](https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X18799177)

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Available in LSE Research Online: September 2018

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## **The Multiple Lives of Affect: A Case Study of Commercial Surrogacy**

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**Abstract:** This article intervenes into contemporary scholarship on affect by bringing different affect theories into the same analytical frame. Analysing commercial surrogacy in India through three different conceptualisations of affect found in the work of Michael Hardt, Sara Ahmed and Brian Massumi reveals how affect emerges as a malleable state in the practice of, as a circulatory force in the debates around, and as an ephemeral intensity in the spontaneous resistance to surrogacy. Based on this analysis, I suggest that integrating different theories of affect enables more holistic examinations of corporeal regulation by opening our understanding to the multiple lives of affect that operate on the level of political economy, cultural signification and material intensity simultaneously.

**Keywords:** Affect, affective labour, cultural analysis, commercial surrogacy, emotion, multiplicity

### **Introduction**

This paper emerges out of an unease with the flattening of affect in a wide range of cultural and social analyses. As Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (2009: 1) point out, affect theory might best be understood as an 'inventory of shimmers' that ranges from classical sociological, psychoanalytic and Marxist to more cultural, new materialist and

non-representational conceptions. Despite the work of scholars like Margaret Wetherell (2012), who give an expansive overview of the different articulations of affect in contemporary social theory, however, different strands of affect theory are rarely put into the same analytical frame. In most analyses, affect is used in a singular conceptualization and even the most productive critiques of the term (Hemmings, 2005; Leys, 2011; Papoulias and Callard, 2010) have targeted particular understandings of affect that do not encompass the diversity of the field. As a consequence, the 'turn to affect' remains a somewhat elusive project in which the contested question of what we are actually turning to and why remains underdeveloped. This leads to theoretical confusion about the object of study that is affect and forestalls a more complex interrogation into the analytical and political hopes that have become attached to different uses of the term.

In this paper, I therefore take Lisa Blackman and Couze Venn's (2010: 9) proposal to consider 'what different versions of bodily affectivity can do in our theorizing' seriously and ask what happens if we put divergent conceptualizations of affect into the same analytical frame. To do so, I draw three influential conceptualizations of affect out of contemporary social and cultural theory and think them through the case study of transnational surrogacy in India. I focus on transnational surrogacy as affect in its multiple forms can be said to play a critical role in the working of, reaction to as well as disruption of this multimillion-dollar business. Affect can be seen to be crucial not only to the actual practice of surrogate workers but also in the larger political debate, in which a ban on commercial surrogacy for non-Indian foreigners, singles, same-sex partners and live-in couples is currently enacted (Malhotra, 2016). Moreover, surrogacy presents a particularly well-studied case study in the field of body studies that offers

enough material to thoroughly think through what a multi-perspectival approach to affect might enable and foreclose. As such, this paper is not based on primary research itself. Instead, it delves into the rich ethnographic archive, that scholars like Amrita Pande (2009a; 2009b; 2010; 2011; 2014), Kalindi Vora (2009; 2012) and Daisy Deomampo (2013; 2016) have provided in recent years, to examine what happens when we analyze practices like transnational surrogacy through different understandings of affect.

For the analysis, I focus on three conceptualizations of affect in particular. The first is the autonomist Marxist conceptualizations of affective labour found in the work of Michael Hardt (1999), the second constitutes the more cultural theorization of affect as a circulatory force developed by Sara Ahmed (2004; 2010; 2014) and the third describe the more ontological understanding of affect as intensity by Brian Massumi (1995; 2002). I focus on these three conceptions of affect as they all constitute relatively early theorizations that have crucially shaped the emerging field of affect studies. In doing so I, do not claim to give a comprehensive overview of the vast landscape of affect theory nor that these are the three most important theories. I, for instance, could have added foundational theories as diverse as Segdwick's (2003) work on Tompkins's basic emotion approach, Walkerdine's (2010) psycho-social conceptualization, or Thrift's (2008) non-representational theory. Similarly, by focussing on this triad of influential theories within Anglo-American, particularly US, scholarship, I bypass emerging work that harnesses alternative genealogies for affect studies— by thinking affect in relation to concepts such as habit (Blackman, 2013; Pedwell, 2017), the non-human (Latimer and Miele, 2013; Venn, 2010) or rhythm and vibration (Henrique, 2010; Henriques, Tiainen and Väliäho, 2014).<sup>1</sup>

While drawing on such theorizations might enrich and complicate future thought on the topic, I start with the work of Hardt, Ahmed and Massumi as they offer three distinct conceptualizations of affect that emerge out of different disciplinary ecologies – and as such are rarely put into the same analytical frame. They mobilize and operate within divergent conceptual frameworks and attach distinct theoretical and political hopes to the turn to affect. In this paper, I thus focus on what, borrowing from Clare Hemmings (2011: 227), I call the 'political grammar' of different affect theories. The term political grammar highlights that the analytical value of particular theories cannot be separated from the larger political and epistemological project that they emerge out of. A focus on political grammar, consequently, tries to understand not only the ontological convictions that underlie particular theorizations of affect but also the theoretical and political promises that are attached to them.

This paper is consequently not primarily about surrogacy. The article is not about solving long-established debates about agency and structure in precarious labour, although these debates inform my analysis, nor is it an in-depth account of how surrogates actually experience their work. Rather my aim in this paper is a more experimental one. By drawing on the case study of commercial surrogacy in India, I want to think about what happens when we try to understand such a dense site of corporeal regulation through different lenses of affect theory. I propose that rather than lamenting the multiplicity of affect theory as an impasse or a contradiction that needs to be resolved in favour of one side or the other, it is exactly the contradictory nature of affect theory that makes it so productive for the field of body studies. More specifically, I argue that integrating different theories of affect enables more holistic examinations of corporeal

regulation by opening our understanding to the multiple lives of affect that operate on the level of political economy, cultural signification and material intensity simultaneously.

### **Transnational Surrogacy in India**

Since its inception in 2002, Indian surrogacy has become a multimillion-dollar industry. The country has quickly become the number one destination for commercial surrogacy with commissioning parents coming predominantly from affluent Western countries such as Australia, Germany and the US. Although there is no reliable information on the exact number of people engaged in commercial surrogacy in India, in 2014 the business was estimated to be worth more than 400 million US-Dollar a year with over 3000 fertility clinics operating across India (Pande, 2014: 213). Historically an anti-natal place that has long focussed on decreasing its population, India provides a peculiar space in global 'reproscapes' (Deomampo, 2016: 11). Its boom can mainly be explained out of a combination of relatively low prices, little regulation, and high medical standards. India, moreover, used to offer gestational surrogacy that uses in vitro fertilization, in which commissioning parents use the eggs of the intended mother (or a donor's egg) and the sperm of the intended father (or another donor); A practice that has long been illegal in countries like Germany, Italy or China and that has similarly been restricted to altruistic surrogacy in states like Mexico, South Africa and the UK (Pande, 2014: 12-13).

Over the last years, however, the industry has similarly come under attack in India. With growing international media attention, concerns voiced by local human rights activist, and the election of new right-wing, Hindu nationalist government, a new

surrogacy bill was introduced in 2016 that would effectively ban all forms of commercial surrogacy. Given the heated public debate, surrogacy has gained renewed attention in scholarly and political debates. Scholars like Amrita Pande (2009a; 2009b; 2010; 2011; 2014), Kalindi Vora (2009; 2012) and Daisy Deomampo (2013; 2016) have created a rich ethnographic archive on the practice of surrogates and how these are shaped and contested through labour regimes, legal regulation, gendered processes of racialization and everyday resistances. While affect has been invoked in their analyses (e.g. Pande, 2014; Rudrappa, 2016; Vora, 2012) the practice has mainly been studied from a more general perspective of affective labour and awaits to be brought into conversation with other theories of affect. What forms of social inquiry do different conceptualizations of affect send us down when trying to make sense of a politically contentious phenomenon like Indian surrogacy? What do they highlight, help to explain and what do they potentially obscure? By posing these questions, I am not proposing that affect will offer a radically new understanding of the practice of surrogacy nor that it is the central or singular element that guides and explains this process. Rather, I suggest that Indian surrogacy provides a valuable case for exploring the strengths and limits of different theorisations of affect and for examining what might be gained by trying to (dis)entangle them.

### **Michael Hardt: Affective labour**

The first conceptualization of affect that I draw upon for the analysis of Indian surrogacy is the concept of affective labour. The concept originates in early Marxist-feminist

scholarship that focussed on pointing out how the care and domestic labour provided by women was overlooked by classical economist as well Marxist thought. It sought to extend existing notions of labour as the production of material goods to include the affective work provided by women in the domestic sphere. Highlighting the gendered nature of the public/private divide, scholars critiqued how the unwaged work provided in the household had been constructed as the natural task of women and therefore remained unacknowledged in the larger analysis of capitalist exploitation (e.g. Dalla Costa and James, 1973; Ferguson, 1989).

The material feminist concept has been taken up and extended by a range of sociological scholars. Arlie Hochschild (2000; 2012), for instance, interrogates current changes in the public/private divide and reveals how, as a result of the increasing integration of women into the labour market in mostly affluent Western countries, reproductive and household labour has largely been taken over by domestic workers, mainly from the Global South. In her now famous thesis on ‘global care chains and emotional surplus value’, she points out how these workers often have to leave their own children in their home countries where they will have to be taken care of by other family members, friends or nannies. One of the most influential contemporary conceptualizations of the term, however, derives from Marxist autonomist scholars (Berardi, 2009; Frederici, 2008; Lazaratto, 2006) who try to make sense out of changing relations of labour in post-Fordist societies. Within this theoretical strand, a focus on affect emerges with the hope to foster a new vocabulary for labour and alienation in post-Fordist societies that helps us think labour away from the industrial factories of blue collar work to the diverse spaces of post-Fordist production. This hope might best be



characterized by the work of Michael Hardt (1999) and his collaborations with Antonio Negri (2001; 2005).

Hardt and Negri (2005: 108) re-define affective labour as ‘labor that produces or manipulates affects such as a feeling of ease well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion’. Stating that ‘affects such as joy and sadness, reveal the present state of life in the entire organism’, they develop a rather expansive definition of affect as states of being that ‘refer equally to body and mind’ (108). Based on this definition, Hardt (1999: 90) posits that in the transformation from an industrial to a service and informational economy, affective labour has become ‘not only directly productive of capital but [located] at the very pinnacle of the hierarchy of labouring forms’. That is, affective labour now forms one if not even *the* crucial sector in the current global economy in which a wide array of economics sectors from health care to the entertainment industry are increasingly relying upon the regulation and production of affect. In other words, affective labour is no longer confined to care work provided in the domestic sphere – albeit it is also still that. Today, he posits, affect has itself become objectified as a central commodity for trade and consumption and holds that what is most important about understanding affect today is how it has become implicated in processes of capitalist value production.

Using this theory as a lens to understand practices of transnational surrogacy highlights the processes through which affective states are altered and commodified in the work of surrogates. Scholars like Deomampo (2016) suggest that what drives the commercial surrogacy business is a racial colonial imaginary that continues to cast Indian women as docile, subservient workers. As Pande (2010: 969- 970) suggests the perfect

‘mother-worker’, however, ‘is not found ready made in India [but] is produced in the fertility clinics and surrogacy hostels’. From the perspective of affective labour, we can see how the disciplining of surrogates’ affects has been at the heart of the business since its inception. Therein, the disciplining of surrogates relies on the complex objective of surrogates becoming professional workers who will not attach to the baby nor the parents it is attended for while at the same time being caring and loving during their pregnancies. The whole process in the surrogate clinics hence relies on sustaining a precarious affective balance between an imperative of care and detachment.

This is achieved through a range of material and discursive practices. For the time of their pregnancy, most surrogates in India live in surrogate hostels or clinics. They live and sleep together in dedicated rooms where their behaviour, diet and social life is surveyed and regulated. Surrogate hostels are often located at distance from surrogates’ family homes and local communities (Vora, 2009). They have a daily routine mainly consisting of designated times for resting and nutrition and surrogates often only get to see their family and friends at certain times of the day or are encouraged to visit their children as a reward for complying with the routines of the clinic (Pande, 2010).

Embedding surrogacy in a discussion of 'stratified reproduction', scholars like Deomampo (2016) stress how in this spatial arrangement the care of the baby for the commissioning parents is prioritized over the relation of care between the surrogates and their own families and communities. We can see, how from Hardt’s perspective, this demarcation of care work is crucially affective. Rather than sustaining life of their immediate families through relational states of love and concern, affection and worry become focussed on the surrogate pregnancy.

To comply with the demands of the economic contract, surrogates are further instructed in technologies of the self that mobilize moral frames and strategies of self-narration as crucial elements in the taming and regulation of affect. In designated counselling sessions, surrogates are ‘made to feel disposable’ (Pande, 2010: 977) and are, for instance, told that they should think of their womb as ‘as an extra room in a house that [they] do not need and that can be rented out’ (Vora, 2009: 271). They are asked to imagine their body as a concrete entity that is separate from their self. That is, they become implicated in the fantasy of a Cartesian body-mind duality in which they are invited to perform their womb as a physical entity and to separate self from the body of their flesh. At the same time, surrogates are asked to override states of pain, sorrow or doubt to hinder possible attachments to the baby by conceptualizing the process of surrogacy as a divine practice of gift-giving – a discourse of sacrificial gift-giving similarly known from Indian organ transplantations (Cohen, 2001).

Early studies of commercial surrogacy (Ragoné, 1994) have pointed out how, in the US, a discourse of divine 'gift-giving' frames the commissioning parent's inability to have children as a tragedy that surrogates are altruistically helping them out of. In the Indian context, these common gift-giving narratives operate in a slightly altered manner. While Vora (2009) notes that surrogates are encouraged to think of their work as sharing the ability to give birth, that the Gods (or God) have bestowed upon them, with less fortunate ones, Pande (2014) explores this process further. She shows how rather than perceiving their labour as ‘angels giving the ultimate gift of God’, surrogates in India are more often instructed and come to construct surrogacy ‘as God’s gift to poor and needy mothers’ (89). They hence come to regard their ability to give birth as a divine gift

intended to lift them out of poverty. As Hardt would have predicted within these practices affective states are shaped and moulded so as to keep surrogates attached to their work. Surrogacy operators try to alter states of fear and desperation into states of honour and gratefulness so that surrogates will perceive the practice as a divine process to be thankful for rather than an economic transaction that they might try to negotiate the payment for.

Within the surrogate hostels, we can see how the work of surrogates relies on a complex double-movement. While asked to redirect affective energies away from their own families and towards the gestation of the new life, they are at the same instructed to stress the separation of self and body so that the exchange can be felt as a (divine) practice of gift-giving. Surrogates are taught to adjust their affective states so as to become the ideal mother-worker that will be affectionate throughout their pregnancy yet still willing to give the baby away without getting attached to it or the family it is intended for. From this perspective, surrogacy arises as a highly disciplined mode of affective labour in which affect is channelled into the gestation of the baby to create a positive state in others— namely the family it is intended for. It might be best understood as 'a new form of value extraction that reaches deep into the body itself, commodifying aspects of life and the life force that were previously conceived as laying outside market logic' (Rudrappa, 2016: 281). Reproducing colonial divisions of labour, it emerges as the 'female underside of globalization' (Hochschild, 2000: 89) in which affective energies are extracted from the Global South to sustain and improve life and sociality in the Global North.

With Hardt (1999: 98) we could consequently frame surrogacy as prime example of 'biopower from below' – the power of the creation of life – and how it is increasingly

regulated and exploited through processes of capitalist accumulation. Affects, from this perspective, emerge as malleable states that are mended and shaped through spatial separation, temporal arrangements and technologies of self-narration. Whereas I have only broadly sketched the complex procedures through which this process takes place in the surrogate hostels, what I hope to have shown is how Hardt's conceptualization of affective labour pushes us to examine in more detail how affective energies are extracted in practices like Indian surrogacy. Tapping into the Marxist vocabulary of the post-Operaismo school, we could define this process as a form of 'affect fetishism' (Arruzza, 2014: 1). That is, as affects are increasingly central to the global economy they become entangled in the process of commodity fetishism: while they work as crucial resources in the production of value, they remain unacknowledged in the final product. Affect from this perspective cannot be understood as singular or separate from economic processes but needs to be examined as a crucial commodity within global market-regimes.

At the same time, Hardt's theory of affective labour gives a limited perspective on processes like surrogacy. While it creates a powerful account of the commodification of affect, it offers a relatively thin theorization of affect. Extending earlier feminist work, it remains unclear in its slippage between affective labour and care work, in which affects – 'expressing a certain state of the body along with a certain mode of thinking' (Hardt, 1999: 108) – easily slide in and out different registers of care, affection and feeling. As such, the concept leads to a neat yet ultimately imprecise narrative of how logics of profit play an increasingly important role in the taming and formation of affect. While Hardt offers an intriguing macro-perspective on thinking about how affects come to be commodified within the global economy, he further seems to mainly add affect to more

classical paradigms of governmentality. Consequently, his approach is in danger of framing surrogates as mere ‘puppets’ within the global economy and he has relatively little to say about how affect works on the more micro-level of the body (and aspect that Massumi will turn us to). Similarly, the concept of affective labour offers us few tools to understand the socio-cultural context under which practices of surrogacy unfold. It offers little vocabulary to talk about the role that cultural frames of stigma and affective attachments play in the current criminalization of the business in India.

### **Sara Ahmed: Affect as a circulatory force**

The second conception of affect I consequently turn to is the more circulatory understanding of affect developed by Sara Ahmed. Her extensive work on the cultural politics of emotion emerges out of a queer-feminist project that tries to understand how power and difference configure in contemporary societies. Ahmed explicitly rejects the classical distinction between affect, preconscious altered states of the body, and emotions, the social categories through which one comes to interpret these (e.g. Clough, 2008). From Ahmed’s poststructuralist perspective, affect is always already entangled in processes of social and cultural mediation so that any sharp distinction between affect and emotion seems theoretically conceivable but analytically unhelpful. This conceptual move opens her work to an engagement with older more established work on emotions in social and philosophical thought. Instead of neo-Marxist theories of labour, Ahmed thus builds on a longer tradition of feminist scholarship that thinks about how the devaluation of emotion ties in with the subordination of the feminine and the body in social and

cultural theory more generally (e.g. Jaggar 1996 and Spelman, 1989). As such, her work might be best understood in relation to the work of queer-feminist cultural theorists like Laurent Berlant (2011), Ann Cvetkovich (2012) or Imogen Tyler (2013) who examine articulations of public feeling by tracing how affect is inscribed in cultural texts.

Ahmed's (2013: 10-15) conceptualization of affect centres around the concept of 'affective economies'. In this, she breaks with the 'inside out' as well as the 'outside in' model of emotions. Emotions are neither purely internal states that belong to an individual, as is posited in most psychological approaches, nor are they simply imposed onto us from outside, as is often theorized in some more sociological understandings of emotions. Instead, Ahmed proposes a more 'economic' conceptualization of affect in which 'emotions play a crucial role in the "surfacing" of individual and collective bodies through the way in which emotions circulate between bodies and signs' (2004: 177). She, for instance, takes European debates around migration to show how affects of fear and suspicion become 'glued' to the body of the asylum seeker (2013: 47). For Ahmed, emotions consequently do not reside in certain objects, bodies or signs, but only come into being as an effect of their circulation. They sediment over time and come 'to reside in objects, only through an erasure of the history of their production in circulation' (11). While Ahmed also opens up possibilities for thinking about the ways in which affect might help us to attach differently, conceptualizing affect as the force that reproduces the historical present, her theoretical focus lies more on the affective ties that bind us. Instead of focussing primarily on how affect is entangled with practices of labour, she examines what role affects play in moving us closer to or further away from other bodies, ideas and objects.

Ahmed's more cultural framing of affect opens our perspective to the circulation of affect in the public sphere and helps us to explain the often-hostile reactions to surrogacy. In Germany, for instance where all forms of surrogacy continue to be illegal, the public intellectual Sibylle Lewitscharoff (2014) famously expressed dominant sentiments towards surrogacy in Germany when she called surrogate children 'Halbwesen' (half-beings) and argued that transnational surrogacy was the most appalling form of reproduction as it completely destroys the natural bond between mother and child. In India, the public discourse is similarly structured, whereby the stigma is particularly attached to the body of the surrogate mothers. Surrogates are framed and perceived as a variation of sex workers that by giving their body to the semen of another man violate their role as caring mothers and loyal wives (Pande, 2009b). We can see how in this case emotions of resentment and disgust that Ahmed (2014: 191) so aptly describes as 'sticky' become glued to the body of both the surrogate mother as well as to the child she gives birth to. As Pande points out this stigma often puts them at even further distance from their families and local communities. They often hide their vocation and might lose contact with former friends, family members and communities. This often further increases the precarious labour conditions that surrogates find themselves in and makes them even more dependent on the surrogate agencies.

Most importantly, however, Ahmed's framework pushes us to examine what role public emotions play in the recent criminalization of commercial surrogacy in India. The success of Indian surrogacy has often been explained by its low cost and comparably little regulation. In recent years, this laissez-faire model has received negative press within as well as outside of India. Sensationalist stories about abandoned babies,



exploited surrogates and dangerous medical practices surfaced. As a reaction, India's home ministry adopted a first piece of legislation in 2013, which specified that commissioning parents who want to make use of Indian surrogacy needed to have been married for at least two years (Crockin, 2013). The current right-wing BJP government has significantly tightened this regulation with the Surrogacy Bill 2016 that allows surrogacy only for 'altruistic' purposes. It prescribes that the intending parents have to be heterosexual, childless, Indian couples who have been married for at least five years and of whom at least one partner has to have fertility issues (Malhotra, 2016). One of the leading ministers behind this legislation, Sushma Swaraj, explained this decision by declaring that commercial surrogacy 'does not go with our ethos' (Al Jazeera, 2016). She declared that 'we do not recognize live-in relationships and homosexuality' and that non-Indian married, heterosexual couples should likewise be denied surrogacy services partly because 'divorces are very common in foreign countries' (ibid).

Within this rhetoric, we can see how the figures of the nation and the family become directly entangled. While India is framed as a place of heterosexual faithfulness (free from homosexuality and extramarital relations), the outside becomes rendered as a space of moral decay and infidelity. Affect theorists such as Laurent Berlant (2011) track how such attachments to traditional formations of the family and the nation are intensifying in late capitalism. She argues that in the current moment in which global economic, social and environmental conditions are deteriorating, it is the idea of the 'good life' represented in the nation-state and the classical nuclear family that forms a last foothold of emotional security and that promises to protect us from the cold embrace of capitalism. Reproductive technologies that not only threaten the lived reality but also

the fantasy of that ideological formation, might thus be expected to face emotional objection. From this perspective, we could understand the latest surrogacy legislation not so much as an actual concern about the welfare about surrogate workers, but rather as a displacement of anxieties about late capitalist decay onto the body of the surrogate.

Whereas tighter medical regulations and improved worker's rights might have actually made a difference to the lives of surrogates, legal scholars like Soma Dey (2016) suggest that this legislation will most likely push the surrogacy business underground, where medical and labour conditions are even less regulated and more precarious. Ahmed's theorization of affect gives us a possible explanation for such radical legislation. Similar to Berlant, she highlights how subjects felt to disrupt normative scripts of happiness (such as that of the happy nuclear family), rather than being attended to, are often erased and pushed out of the national body altogether— as their presence too easily disturbs the precarious texture of that fantasy (Ahmed, 2010). Different to more classical understandings moral economies, such a perspective highlights how concepts of nation and family become imbued with affective attachments. It moves us from a more rationalist understanding of the construction of morality to a focus on the emotive qualities of normativity. As Ahmed puts it “attention to emotions allows us to address the question of how subjects become invested in particular structures such that their demise is felt as a kind of living death” (2014: 12).

The more cultural understanding of affect developed by scholars like Sara Ahmed hence provides an effective tool to draw out how normative formations such as the nuclear family activate their power through affect. It reveals how through its circulation, subjects are drawn closer to the idea of the genetic nuclear family and are placed at

distance from surrogate mothers, children and other people involved in the process. This conceptualization consequently allows us to further illuminate not only the economic, but also the more political and moral dimensions of the exchange and offers a valuable counterpoint to Hardt's more restricted understanding of affect as affective labour. It shows how public spheres might best be understood as 'affect worlds' where emotional forces lead ahead of rational and deliberative thought (Berlant, 1997). As such Ahmed's theorization helps us to grasp affect as a political force that not only constitutes public opinion but also materializes in tangible regulatory legislation.

Despite its analytical power for explaining how we become attached to social norms, this conceptualization however also has its limitations. It pulls us into understanding affect as always already constituted through processes of mediation. As Wetherell (2015: 160) notes, it is 'beautifully crafted for cultural analyses' and 'opens the way for some brilliant analyses of cultural texts and their functioning'. Understanding affect primarily through the lens of mediation and cultural representation, however, carries the danger of assuming that attachments to normative formations like the nuclear family are shared, rather than to investigate in more detail how different people actually experience these. As such, Ahmed's theory has few tools to offer for examining the 'negotiation and parsing of affects as complex, live, often highly troubled, on-going categorizations of human action' (Wetherell, 2015: 159). Moreover, scholars like Clough (2008) and Massumi (1995) would lament that collapsing emotion and affect was exactly what the turn to affect was trying to circumvent. They would argue that it stalls any intent to understand how affectivity can work outside of and beyond forms of signification and cultural mediation and obscures affect's more resistant and spontaneous features.

## **Brian Massumi: Affect as intensity**

The third conceptualization of affect that I consequently want to draw upon is the understanding of affect proposed by Brian Massumi. This conceptualization of affect arises out of a different context altogether. Instead of a continuation of a neo-Marxist theorization of labour or a feminist-queer engagement with cultural theory, for scholars like Massumi affect emerges as part of a new vocabulary that is supposed to bring us beyond the limits of both cultural Marxism and poststructuralist theory. He posits that the most dominant paradigms within cultural theory are restricted as they map social phenomena against a grid of power that is mostly already known or assumed (Massumi, 2002). What is at lost in these accounts, according to Massumi, is 'the event— in favor of structure' (Massumi, 1995: 87). While, for him, structure is 'the place where nothing ever happens, that explanatory heaven in which all eventual permutations are prefigured in a self-consistent set of invariant generative rules', he argues that 'nothing is prefigured in the event. It is the collapse of structured distinction into intensity, of rules into paradox' (87). Affect for Massumi hence emerges as the centre of a new more hopeful vocabulary for cultural theory that will turn us towards the more messy, unexpected features of social life.

Similar to scholars like Patricia Clough (2007; 2008) or Nigel Thrift (2008), Massumi consequently makes a clear distinction between affect, which he defines as intensity, and emotions, the concepts through which these intensities become socially and culturally legible. While emotions are socially coded and available to consciousness,

affects are prepersonal. As such 'emotion and affect – if affect is intensity – follow different logics and pertain to different orders' (Massumi, 1995: 27). Building upon a range of neuroscientific and media-response studies, Massumi claims that human organisms operate on two parallel yet autonomous systems: one of quality and one of intensity. Whereas emotion works on the system of quality that is consciously available and mediated through processes of signification and representation, affect works on the 'unassimilable' level of intensity (88). This level of intensity 'is not semantically or semiotically ordered' and is embodied in mostly automatic reactions (85). According to Massumi, cultural theory has nearly exclusively focussed on the level of quality and thereby neglected the more ephemeral, unpredictable level of intensity. Rather than on trying to understand how affect is extracted through forms of labour (Hardt) or how it circulates in cultural representation (Ahmed), Massumi consequently aims to open up new pathways for thinking about different individual encounters with intensity.

Massumi's conceptualization of affect is probably the most difficult to use as a lens for understanding practices of commercial surrogacy as, if affect is an ephemeral unassimilable concentration of intensity, it is bound to escape our intent to capture it. His focus on affect as non-conscious forms of intensity, however, might allow us to explain the unintended kinship ties that often emerge from surrogacy, like deep affection of surrogate mothers for the babies, or close relationships between surrogate mothers and commissioning parents. Although the whole training in the surrogate hostels circles around disciplining surrogates to distance themselves from the baby, many surrogates report feeling deeply attached to them. The surrogates explain their attachments in highly bodily terms and state that the physical bond they have established with the baby extends

over the pregnancy and keeps them attached to children long after they have been taken away from India. One surrogate, for instance, reports that: 'After all they gave the genes, but the blood, all the sweat is mine', whereas another one states that: 'It's hard for me not to be attached. I have felt him growing and moving inside me. I have gone through stomach aches, back aches and over five months of loss of appetite!' (in Pande, 2009a: 384). While this form of affective attachment is consciously narrated, it hints at another layer connection that works on more immediate level of material intensity.

Likewise, scholars report how surrogate mothers and commissioning parents often form long-standing relationships. This is surprising as commissioning parents and surrogate mothers are expected to enter a purely professional relationship and mostly only get to see each other for a short interview, or during the birth of the baby (Vora, 2009). Moreover, surrogates and commissioning parents mostly come from different socio-economic backgrounds and often do not speak the same language, so that verbal communication during these short meetings is highly impeded (Deomampo, 2013). Nevertheless, both commissioning parents and surrogate mothers sometimes report feelings of deep attachment and they stay in contact with surrogates long after the baby is born. Some surrogate mothers say that her relationship with the genetic mother is 'like between sisters' and a commissioning mother recalls that although they 'could communicate just through laughter and tears' she now feels deeply attached to the surrogate and is still in touch with her years after the birth of her child (in Pande, 2011: 622-623).

We could explain these relationships through a sense of guilt or gratitude that couples and surrogate mothers feel for each other. With Massumi we could, however,

also understand these ties as a result of the capacity of bodies to transmit affective intensities without verbal communication (see also Brennan, 2004). This might be best illustrated in the delivery of surrogacy babies in the birthing room that commissioning parents commonly attend. According to Hochschild (2012: 103), these births are very moving events and regularly end with all the involved parties crying. In this situation, an intense affective charge is created that enmeshes all bodies involved. We could frame this as a moment of affective liminality (Stenner and Moreno-Gabriel, 2013) in which the restraints of social structures are suspended for a fraction of time and that might explain the forging of long-lasting ties between surrogates and commissioning parents. In this situation, affect thus works as the ‘unassimilable’ (Massumi, 2002: 3) that resists the material and cultural barriers that are supposed to impede the creation of attachments between surrogate mothers and the commissioning family.

Of course, in particular the bond between the surrogate and the baby might likewise be explained out of a ‘natural’ bond between mother or child. Massumi's approach to affect, however, offers us a more complex perspective that goes against essentialist readings of how kinship structures are formed. This framework can also shed light on the sometimes highly affective bonds between surrogate mothers and commissioning parents as well as the variety of situations in which many surrogates report no such attachments. The more ontological conceptualization of affect reveals how despite the transaction being framed in mainly economic terms and the disciplinary training that surrogate mothers receive in the surrogate hostels, affective sensations resist these prohibitions as they might be said to work on a different, unmediated level of intersubjectivity. Affect, in this conceptualization, can be said to ‘kick back’ and disrupt

the relations envisioned by the surrogate business as well as our common understanding of how kinship structures are formed. The agentic transmission of affect consequently breaks with the idea of an energetically self-contained subject and shows how the body can be thought of as an open assemblage that is entangled with other bodies, moods and atmospheres. As such it forges a path in between biologically essentialist and socio-economically deterministic understandings of the social and foreground the stubborn, messy and unexpected role that intensities play in practices like transnational surrogacy.

Like the other two conceptualizations, however, this understanding of affect also merely provides a partial perspective on Indian surrogacy. As Hemmings (2005: 551) points out, Massumi seems to deploy a potentially overly hopeful perspective that, ‘may be an interesting and valuable critical focus in context, [but] often emerges as a rhetorical device whose ultimate goal is to persuade “paranoid theorists” into a more productive frame of mind’. She argues that invoking affect as the way into a more creative paradigm of cultural theory relies upon the homogenization of poststructuralist theory as socially deterministic and ignorant to the materiality of the body. This dismissal of earlier paradigms is not only problematic for obscuring the diversity of voices within poststructuralist scholarship (particularly in its feminist and postcolonial mode) but also makes it difficult to integrate their understanding with insights from alternative conceptualizations of affect. The Massumian conceptualization of affect consequently ignores how in the surrogacy business affects might not only function as the unassimilable but might likewise be taken up and mobilized by larger cultural discourses as shown by Ahmed or shaped by economic practices as argued by Hardt.



## Conclusion

What can we now make out of this analytical experiment? I hope to have shown that thinking affect theories in terms of their political grammar is important. Different conceptualizations of affect emerge out of particular theoretical contexts and further previous ways of thinking about how the world works within these fields. Hardt's conceptualization of affective labour arises out of Marxist autonomist framework that tries to think about changing relations of production and alienation in late capitalism. Ahmed's discussion of affective economies must be understood as part of a larger queer-feminist project that aims to think how power and difference are configured through affective attachments. And Massumi's scholarship works in conjunction with a broader turn in the social sciences that tries to think cultural analyses beyond the predictable concern with quality and structure to a more open epistemology of intensity and the event. These concepts hence emerge within larger narratives of what social theory should do and attach different hopes to what a focus on affect can do.

As such these conceptualizations are not innocent. Depending on the conceptualization of affect that we start with, we will end up with different analyses of what role it plays within practices like transnational surrogacy. A focus on affective labour, for instance, pulls us to contextualize phenomenon like transnational surrogacy in the larger gendered and racialized chains of global (re)production. It pushes us into an analysis of how the commodification of surrogate's affective states works through disciplinary techniques and reveals how affect is channelled away from the Global South to sustain life and sociality in the Global North. Ahmed's conceptualization of affect

makes us attentive to the more discursive processes that are involved in the reaction to Indian surrogacy. It points out how affects stick to certain bodies and as such influences processes of social segregation. This does not only increase the dependency of surrogates on the surrogate agencies but also influence official state legislations that ultimately come to push surrogate workers further into precarity. The conceptualization of affect by Massumi moreover points us towards the unpredictable, more subliminal forces of intensity. It can help us to explain how despite the tight regulations unintended kinship structures are formed through the communicative power of matter and as such pulls us in a more hopeful direction to that of the other two more top-down conceptualizations, in which affect is always already implicated with economic or cultural domination.

This account then underlines that simply understanding one conceptualization of affect as 'correct' or more 'truthful' might limit our analyses. Coming from a perspective of queer and feminist cultural studies, I am, for instance, most drawn to Ahmed's understanding of affect as a circulatory force. I could now defend her approach and try to fault Hardt for his structurally over-determined account of affective labour or critique Massumi for providing a rather ahistorical conceptualization of affect that is blind to its culturally specific articulations. And whereas I do think that there might be value in this, I want to resist this impulse as it would again separate different epistemologies and styles of critique from one another. As shown in the analysis, whereas Ahmed's approach might be valuable for the form of cultural critique that I am most attached to, it, for instance, tends to miss how affect has become a commodity within the global economy and how it might likewise work on a level of intensity outside or below processes of representation. It might consequently be misguided to see the question of different theories of affect as a

question of incommensurability in which one concept is seen as more correct or truthful than the other.

Rather I want to suggest that it might be more productive to think of the different conceptualization of affect not so much as incommensurable epistemologies but as simultaneous ontologies. In *The Body Multiple*, Annemarie Mol (2002: 6) affirms that 'no object, no body, no disease is singular'. Through an ethnographic study at a Dutch hospital, she shows how atherosclerosis is not a singular object – a vascular disease with an agreed upon definition– but that it becomes enacted in various ways. For Mol the question of the body consequently can not only be thought of as one of perspectivism – the different ways in which we can look at the body– but as a matter of ontological multiplicity. Bound up in an array of different practices, technologies and knowledges, for her, the body is always more than one. Extending her ideas to the study of affectivity, we might likewise think of affect having multiple lives. As shown in the study of surrogacy, affect is enacted, or even enacts itself differently in different scenarios. In the confined disciplinary spaces of the surrogacy hostels, affect is performed as a malleable state that through the labour of the body becomes harnessed into a global commodity. In the realm of social debate, affect works as a circulatory force that 'sticks' to certain bodies and as such acts as a motor of social separation, whereas in the thick atmosphere of the birthing room, affect emerges as a resistant, ephemeral state of intensity that 'kicks back' and as such disrupts the normative confines of the economic transaction.

Like the body, affect might then best be understood as a phenomenon whose manifestations are multifarious. Instead of thinking different theories against each other, such an approach allows us to examine how different manifestations of affect diverge but

also how they work synergistically, hang together and even morph into each other. Pairing Ahmed with Hardt, we can, for instance, see how affect as a circulatory force intensifies practices of affective labour through the mobilisation of discursive tropes such as the 'empty womb' or the practice of 'divine gift-giving'. The circulation of affect in discourse hence directly intersects with its disciplining in labour practices. Further, while Hardt's conceptualization of affective labour highlights how affects might be understood as malleable states shaped through labour practices, Massumi points us to the limits of such malleability and foregrounds how affect comes to 'resist' and 'kick back'. This reveals how affect can be said to work as a malleable force that binds us and an unassimilable intensity that resists the inscription of power simultaneously.

Thinking affect as multiple thus enables not only analytically sharper but also politically more salient analyses. It invites us to engage in multifarious forms of thinking that cut across well-trodden paths of cultural theory and pushes us to think complex cases like Indian surrogacy across and beyond the political parameters of economic exploitation, cultural normativity or the spontaneous resistance of the event. Asking which conceptualization of affect is better or more 'truthful' might thus be the wrong approach that will eventually lead us into different dead-ends of cultural critique. Instead, I have suggested that thinking several concepts of affect together opens our understanding for the different work that affect does, not only in our theorizing but also in the empirical world. It constitutes a productive perspective for future scholarship as it resists singular epistemologies, allows us to bring in alternative genealogies of the term and invites creative engagements with the empirical that generate new insights about how the multiple lives of affect diverge, overlap and hang together.



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<sup>1</sup> For post- and decolonial approaches that try to decenter Eurocentric perspectives on affect altogether see, for instance, Gunew (2016).

Acknowledgments: I want to thank Clare Hemmings for supporting this project and encouraging me to further develop this paper. Thank you also to Sadie Wearing and the participants of the ‘Understanding Global Politics Affectively’ symposium held at the LSE in June 2015 for the constructive feedback. I am grateful to Melissa Chacón, Marco Dell’oca, Jacqui Gibbs, Michelle Pfeifer, Emma Spruce and Howard Rechavia Taylor as well as the editorial board and anonymous reviewers of *Body & Society*. Their constructive feedback has helped greatly in strengthening and clarifying the argument of this article.

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