

## **AFFECT - OR FEELING (after Leys)**

### **Abstract**

In recent years the ‘affective turn’ has permeated the arts, humanities, social sciences, and psychology, but like any influential academic movement has not escaped critique. We outline and agree in general terms with the critique by Leys (2011b), which emphasises the influence of the basic emotion paradigm; the dualisms that accompany its deployment; and concerns regarding intentionality and meaning. We then propose an alternate approach to affect and feeling, derived from the philosophies of Whitehead and Langer; demonstrate how this avoids the endorsement of cognitivism to which Leys critique succumbs; illustrate the strengths of this approach with respect to analyses of former U.S. President Reagan; and highlight two strengths of affect theory which are compatible with it. We conclude that our approach closes the intentionality gap that Leys identifies whilst retaining a fruitful emphasis upon the affective realm.

### **Affect – or feeling? (after Leys)**

In recent years the ‘affective turn’ – a central concern with, and analytic focus upon, the phenomena designated by terms such as affect, emotion and feeling - has permeated the arts, humanities and social sciences, and is now influential within disciplines including literary studies, geography, history, cultural studies, sociology, criminology, social theory and political theory (for an introductory overview see Gregg & Seigworth, 2010).

At the same time, the affective turn is becoming increasingly influential within psychology. With respect to theoretical psychology, Brown and Stenner (2001) discuss the relevance of Spinoza's ethics. His ethics of knowing posits that body and mind are two attributes of the same substance, and proposes that increasing the capacity of the body to both be affected and to affect others is the means by which the knowing subject progresses; Brown and Stenner utilise Spinoza's position to argue for a post-cognitive understanding of emotion. More recently, Falmagne (2011) has argued that the affective roots of thought are underemphasized in psychology, and that consequently the enmeshed biographical links between the affective life of the knowing subject and her/his 'mental' life - the personal, societal and transgenerational influences that affectively shape thought - require elaboration. Whilst Brown and Stenner (2001) and Falmagne (2011) have different starting points (and their writing is separated by a decade), they share a concern for re-thinking the relationship between what have traditionally been considered as separate psychological realms: feeling, emotion or the affective and thought, cognition or the mental. This concern, which frequently animates work associated with the affect turn, is one we also share.

The turn to affect has also been taken up in social and critical psychology. Blackman and Cromby (2007) argued that affect theory provides a conceptual language for addressing embodied subjectivity, allowing (critical) social psychologists to move away from a focus solely on discourse and language, and affording opportunities to engage with colleagues in other disciplines – who, paradoxically, are sometimes taking up resources that they have previously rejected. For example, and as we will elaborate, we question Leys (2011) strategy of turning to appraisal theories of emotion in response to what she considers the limitations of affect theory. Also in social psychology, and as we explain more fully below, Wetherell (2012) embraces the focus upon affect but cautions against tendencies within it that would

oppose it to, rather than integrate it with, social and critical psychological studies of language: we share this concern, too.

The affective turn has also begun to permeate clinical psychology and conceptualisations of psychological distress. Brown and Reavey (2015) make affect central to their concept of 'vital memory'. Bringing together empirical material from research with 'vulnerable' groups including survivors of child sexual abuse, forensic mental health service users and survivors of the 2005 London bombings, Brown and Reavey reconceptualise memory in a way that sees the contextual features of acts of remembering as critically important. Simultaneously, they view affect as an arrangement of relations vital both to the production of subjectivity and the formation of memory. Cromby and Harper (2009) provide an account of paranoia grounded in a minimal notion of embodied subjectivity constituted from the interpenetration of feeling, perception and discourse, conceptualising paranoia as a lived tendency that gets co-constituted in the dialectical associations between subjectivity and relational, social and material influences. Similarly, Liebert (2013) uses affect theory to illuminate some of the ways in which degrees of risk circulate around, and may get associated with, people given the diagnosis of bipolar disorder, tracing the various technologies by and through which affects associated with surveillance and terror come to structure their lives.

Health psychology has also been influenced by the affective turn. Stenner and Moreno (2013) use affect theory to articulate the liminality that constitutes difficult decisions about deceased organ donation in Spanish hospitals. Cromby (2012, 2015) develops an understanding of belief as an organisation of socialized feeling, contingently allied to discursive practices and positions, and shows how this conceptualisation illuminates the evidence in health psychology for small beneficial effects upon illness of religious beliefs, and how it explains certain aspects of health beliefs regarding tobacco-smoking and illness. Relatedly, Willis (2015) develops a sophisticated account of the role of feeling (informed by

Whitehead's philosophy) in the moral decisions, and associated moral distress, of nurses working in hospitals in the UK.

Reflecting its interdisciplinary character, affect research is sometimes being conducted by people with backgrounds in psychology, but being published elsewhere. Ellis, Tucker, and Harper (2013) describe how contemporary infrastructures of surveillance inculcate 'affective atmospheres' that can be experienced as either reassuring or threatening. Blackman (2012) presents a comprehensive synthesis of affect scholarship that speaks to audiences in cultural studies, critical theory and the sociology of the body, as well as psychology. Similarly, Walkerdine (2010) uses affect theory to explicate the trauma consequent upon the decimation of the mining industry in a small and relatively isolated community, whilst Ellis and Tucker (2011) present an analysis of the political significances of hope for contemporary neoliberal subjectivities. And, conversely, relevant research is also being published by sociologists such as Burkitt (2014), who have long been influential within psychology and whose recent work engages directly with affect and emotion.

As this necessarily brief and illustrative survey begins to demonstrate, affect scholarship is gaining ground within psychology, as it is within many social sciences disciplines. However, like any influential intellectual trend, the affective turn has also garnered critiques. Hemmings (2005) noted that, sometimes, affect theorists situate their work as a 'new cutting edge' in opposition to poststructuralist and deconstructionist theories of language. This allows them to highlight how analyses of the discursive structuring of subjectivity result in a dematerialised body, thus opening space to propose affect as the missing analytic element which returns to the corporeal and material elements of experience. Hemmings is also critical of the way that some affect theorists (e.g., Massumi and Sedgwick) position affect as ontologically prior to the sociolinguistic – as a force operating outside

social meaning – arguing that this negates epistemological concerns with truth, justice and equality.

Similarly, as noted above, Wetherell (e.g. 2012, 2015) is also concerned with how affect frequently gets positioned as before or outside of language. She welcomes and elaborates upon how analyses of affect, emotion or feeling might enrich psychology and social science, supplying lengthy discussions and considered evaluations of the conceptual and evidential resources deployed within this work. Nevertheless, Wetherell warns that affect scholars such as Sedgwick, Thrift and Ahmed risk “depopulating affecting scenes, mystifying affective contagion, and authorizing questionable psychobiological arguments” (Wetherell 2015, p.139) and consistently rejects the notion of affect “as an unspecific force, unmediated by consciousness, discourse, representation and interpretation of any kind” (Wetherell 2012, p.123). Rather than any sharp disjunction between affect and the discursive or socio-linguistic, Wetherell therefore proposes the analysis of contextually situated and para-discursive affective practices.

Here, though, we are primarily interested in arguably the most comprehensive critique of the affective turn: that presented by Leys (2011b), which we read as resting upon three interconnected elements. First, the pervasive influence of the basic emotion paradigm and associated neuroscientific and psychological experiments and concepts. Second, the dualisms that accompany the deployment of this work. Third, and most importantly for Leys, the conjoined issues of intentionality and meaning, and in particular the problems these engender for analyses that engage with culture, ideology and politics. Leys does acknowledge differences between key figures associated with the affective turn: not just Massumi, with whose work she engages at length, but also others including Connolly, Thrift, Sedgwick and Smail. She nevertheless proposes that, effectively, “they all share a single belief: the belief that affect is independent of signification and meaning” (2011b, p. 443).

Others have already responded to Leys: Connolly (2011) argued for a more complex understanding of intentionality and for the benefits of interdisciplinary engagement; Altieri (2012) also discussed intentionality, in relation to moods, art and non-conceptual experiences; and Frank and Wilson (2012) disagreed that Tompkins' affect theory can be simply equated with the basic emotion paradigm. In turn, Leys (2011a, 2012) replied, for the most part reiterating and reinforcing her initial position. Whilst we will occasionally echo aspects of these responses (Connolly's invocation of Whitehead, Altieri's discussion of moods), we will respond in a predominantly different register. First, we will agree in general terms with Leys' (2011b) analysis of dominant tendencies within this movement; second, we will propose an alternate approach to the realm of affect and feeling, derived from the philosophies of Whitehead and Langer; and third, demonstrate how this alternative avoids the endorsement of cognitivism to which – on our reading – Leys critique succumbs.

### **The Critique**

Most fundamentally, Leys (2011b) is concerned with the way that basic emotion theories from neuroscience and psychology have been taken up within the affective turn. These theories share various precepts including a view of certain (not all) emotions as evolutionarily ancient, hardwired systems or programs; pan-culturally and trans-historically shared by all humans; primarily enabled by subcortical brain systems; capable of rapid activation or discharge; and associated with distinctive patterns of facial expression, behavioural preparedness and physiological-autonomic responses. Collectively, Leys characterises these theories as the *basic emotion paradigm*. Whilst these theories wield considerable influence they have also been criticised, and there is evidence (both empirical and conceptual) suggesting that they are overly simplistic. In psychology and emotion science Ekman's (1992) six basic emotions (happiness, surprise, anger, sadness, disgust and fear) are perhaps the best known exemplar, although within the affective turn more attention

has been given to the work of Ekman's mentor, Tompkins. As Leys observes, basic emotion theories vary in both the substance and number of basic emotions posited. Ekman's six basic emotions were subsequently expanded to fifteen, to include experiences such as 'sensory pleasure' and 'pride in achievement'; conversely, Panksepp's (1998) neuroscientific account posits just four basic affect systems: fear, rage, panic and expectancy. More so than Panksepp, however, it is the affective neuroscience of Damasio and Le Doux that informs the affective turn, albeit that their work likewise endorses the basic emotions paradigm.

Leys demonstrates how the basic emotion paradigm is a common thread within the turn to affect. In some cases, her claim that affect theorists utilise neuroscientific and psychological notions of basic emotion appears to be transparent reportage. Sedgwick (e.g., Sedgwick & Frank, 2003), for example, explicitly endorses Tompkins' biologically-based affect theory, using it within a penetrating essay exploring shame in relation to systems theory explanations of human behaviour (like other scholars, Tompkins views shame as especially important for understandings of human affectivity). In other writings the associations between affect scholarship and the basic emotion paradigm are more indirect, dependent upon the largely uncritical uptake within them of neuroscientific work – such as Damasio's – which endorses it. It should be noted that Damasio's (1995) earlier work on the somatic marker hypothesis was precisely concerned with the operation and neuroanatomy of kinds of feeling *not* enabled by basic emotion circuits. Nevertheless, even here Damasio used the notion of basic emotions to distinguish these feelings, categorising them as 'secondary' by comparison, and his overall commitment to the basic emotion paradigm is clear. Hence, to the extent that scholars such as Connolly and Thrift draw uncritically upon Damasio, they may import into their work some assumptions and presuppositions of the basic emotion paradigm.

However, there is also a significant strand of affect scholarship – most prominently, Massumi’s work - that engages less with neuroscience and psychology and draws primarily upon Deleuze (including his writings with Guattari) and so, in turn, upon Spinoza. Like Leys, we will not engage with the issue of whether Deleuze (or Spinoza) are being interpreted accurately within this work. Leys’ critique necessarily becomes more analytical at this point since “many of these theorists make a distinction between affect and emotion in terms that, again at first sight, seem different from those of the Basic Emotions paradigm” (2011b, p. 441). Massumi (1995) defines affect as “unqualified intensity”, and distinguishes it sharply from emotion, which he describes as both a “subjective content” and a “sociolinguistic fixing” of experience. For Massumi emotion is personal whereas affect is *pre-personal*, coming before experience and consisting purely of ‘intensity’: energy, force, motivation, given propensities toward salience. Emotion is the residue of affect once its effects are tamed, captured or normalised by the sociolinguistic. So rather than being directly experienced, affect precedes experience, providing its motive force or conditions of possibility. Hence, affect necessarily eludes signification, representation and semantic capture, since it is the very power which makes these – and indeed all other activities – possible. As Leys (2011b, p. 442) puts it, “the concept of affect is tied to a ‘nonrepresentationalist’ ontology that defines affect in terms derived from Spinoza as the capacity to affect and be affected. Characterized in this way, affect is then seen to function as a layer of preconscious ‘priming to act’”.

Massumi is not the only advocate of such a notion, versions of which can also be found in Shouse (2005) and Thrift (2004, 2008). Notwithstanding the impressive philosophical work these scholars conduct in distinguishing affect from emotion, Leys (2011b, p. 442) observes that nevertheless “it is striking how compatible Deleuze-inspired definitions of affect as a nonlinguistic, bodily ‘intensity’ turn out to be with the Tomkins-Ekman paradigm”. Illustrating this, Leys describes how Thrift (2004) develops a notion of



affect as distinct from emotion, then immediately discusses evidence and concepts supplied by Tompkins, Ekman and Damasio: having distinguished affect from emotion, Thrift illustrates its operation with reference to work derived from the basic emotion paradigm. Leys is not the only commentator to have observed this tendency; Greco and Stenner (2008) likewise noted that when affect theorists engage with substantive topics it is almost invariably emotion terms that they deploy. They concluded that this means that sharp distinctions between affect and emotion probably cannot be sustained: similarly, Leys argues that despite the superficial incommensurability of the basic emotion paradigm with these notions of affect, there are connections between them. Further connections can be revealed by considering Leys' other concerns: dualisms and intentionality.

Once affect is distinguished from emotion, posited as a prepersonal intensity never directly experienced, there is considerable potential for dualisms: most notably, if paradoxically, the Cartesian dualism between mind and body. The paradox is that affect theories seem to undercut this dualism by granting powers of meaning generation and appraisal to the body, thus blurring the body-mind distinction. Leys recognises this but nevertheless argues that, by placing affect before experience, Massumi and others create “a disjunction or gap between the subject's affective processes and his or her cognition or knowledge of the objects that caused them.” (Leys, 2011b, p. 450). In this theorising, affects operate and are influential within the body (albeit that in most formulations they are flowing, contagious, transmitted, suggestible and not confined to particular, individual bodies). Hence “the body not only ‘senses’ and performs a kind of ‘thinking’ below the threshold of conscious recognition and meaning but ... because of the speed with which the autonomic, affective processes are said to occur, it does all this before the mind has time to intervene” (Leys, 2011b, p. 450). So despite the way that affect theories extend sensing into the body,

Leys argues that they are dualistic because they first separate this sensing from experience, then give it priority over other ways of knowing.

Leys makes a similar point in relation to Massumi's discussion of Libet's classic experiments, which seemingly show a half-second delay between the brain activity representing the beginning of a decision-making process and the subsequent movement of a finger. Massumi casts this half-second as proof that "the material processes of the body-brain generate our thoughts, and that conscious thought or intention arrives too late to do anything other than supervise the results" (2011b, p. 454). Leys observes that this interpretation is challenged by various scholars, who note that the finger and wrist movements Libet timed are normally conducted without conscious awareness anyway. She also considers conceptual and phenomenological analyses that recognise how the actions Libet timed occurred within a wider intentional context where participants gave informed consent, were instructed about what actions to produce, and held conscious intentions to perform those actions at some point. On this basis, Leys (2011b, p. 456-457) concludes that:

"both Massumi and Libet seem to be in the grip of a false picture of how the mind relates to the body. The mistake they make is to idealize the mind by defining it as a purely disembodied consciousness and then, when the artificial requirements of the experimental setup appear to indicate that consciousness of the willing or intention comes 'too late' in the causal chain to account for the movements under study, to conclude in dualist fashion that intentionality has no place in the initiation of such movements and that therefore it must be the brain which does all the thinking and feeling and moving for us. (All the 'willing', so to speak.)"

So Leys argues that the turn to affect is thoroughly indebted to the basic emotion paradigm. She also finds that, regardless of overt Spinozist commitments, there are elements

of Cartesian dualism within it. Her primary disquiet, however, is with how these concerns impact upon intentionality and meaning, problematizing analyses of ideology, belief and desire. Running through Leys' paper is a continuous concern with the political implications of this politically engaged work, since: "what motivates these scholars is the desire to contest a certain account of how, in their view, political argument and rationality have been thought to operate." (2011b, p. 436). For example, Massumi's (1995) widely cited paper concludes by discussing US presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton, and his now iconic analysis of Reagan proposes that his electoral success depended more on his affective associations than his intellectual capabilities:

"It was commonly said that he ruled primarily by projecting an air of confidence. That was the emotional tenor of his political manner, dysfunction notwithstanding. ... The actualizations relaying the Reagan incipience varied. But ... they consistently included an overweening feeling of confidence – that of the supposedly sovereign individual within a supposedly great nation at whose helm idiocy and incoherence reigned. In other words, Reagan was many things to many people, but within a general framework of affective jingoism" (Massumi, 1995, p. 103)

So Massumi proposes that Reagan's success was not a function of intellect, knowledge, the grasp of detail or of complex issues: indeed, Reagan was ridiculed for his shortcomings in these respects. Rather, Reagan's combination of affable vagueness and quiet confidence, principally conveyed through "the timbre of his voice, that beautifully vibratory voice", enabled him to become "so many things to so many people" (Massumi, 1995, pp. 102-103) so mobilising affective support even from those who – conventionally, logically, rationally – disagreed with him.

It is notable that, in making his case for the affective character of Reagan's appeal, even Massumi must engage with the conventional (discursive, narrative) meanings of his presidency. Leys' concern is that in sharply distinguishing between the affective and the sociolinguistic, Massumi and others not only endorse a questionable basic emotion paradigm, they generate inconsistencies in their own work and obstacles to other analyses. Her objection is not that affect is irrelevant to political and cultural analysis, nor that we should be unconcerned about its inculcation and manipulation by the powerful. She is concerned that separating affect from signification (by placing it before experience) necessarily precludes or de-emphasises analysis of meanings, reasons and beliefs, and therefore of ideology: "The disconnect between 'ideology' and affect produces as one of its consequences a relative indifference to the role of ideas and beliefs in politics, culture, and art in favor of an 'ontological' concern with different people's corporeal affective reactions" (Leys, 2011b, p. 451). Reflecting the suppositions of the basic emotion paradigm, affect is non-intentional: there are no necessary connections between the content of any given affect and the stimulus that triggered or released it, hence the affect – in itself – is essentially meaningless. Moreover, even for Massumi – whose scholarship is not explicitly connected to the basic emotion paradigm – the problem is no less acute because he ultimately:

"comes across as a materialist who invariably privileges the 'body' and its affects over the 'mind' in straightforwardly dualist terms ... That is why Massumi finds the work of scientists such as Libet so congenial; as we have seen, Libet privileges the body in such a way as to claim that the mind always functions 'too late' for intention and reason to play a decisive role in action and behavior. In this regard, Massumi's attitude toward the sciences is scarcely to be differentiated from that of non-Deleuzian affect scholars" (Leys, 2011b, p. 468)

To summarise: Leys argues that the borrowings from neuroscience and psychology within the affective turn introduce materialist presumptions and dualist tendencies; in so doing they strip affect of intentionality and meaning. These problems are pervasive, visible in some way within the work of each of the scholars whose work Leys considers, and lead her to conclude that “one price their views exact is to imply such a radical separation between affect and reason as to make disagreement about meaning, or ideological dispute, irrelevant to cultural analysis” (2011b, p. 472).

We are in broad agreement with these critiques and wish to commend Leys for her penetrating analysis. At the same time, we wish to differ from her conclusion, in which – albeit in a somewhat lukewarm fashion – she endorses a version of the cognitivism to which affect theory provides a refreshing corrective. Leys’ wants to promote “alternative accounts ... that do not make the error of separating the affects from cognition or meaning in the way the recent theorists I have been discussing do” (2011b, pp. 468-469). But whilst she then makes passing mention of Freudian psychoanalysis, the bulk of her concluding remarks describe the rise of anti-intentionalism as a historical trend within emotion science, and posit cognitive appraisal theories as its counterpoint and corrective. But this means that, to rescue meaning and intentionality, Leys largely subordinates affect, emotion and feeling to appraisal, interpretation and representation. In striving to prevent cognition and affect from being artificially separated, she endorses a paradigm within which affect is always consequent to, or dependent upon, prior cognitive appraisal. By endorsing appraisal theories, Leys therefore erects a version of the very affect-cognition boundary she has been challenging, but reverses the order of priority in their relation.

Just as the basic emotion paradigm imports unhelpful assumptions into affect scholarship, cognitive appraisal theories bear their own limiting assumptions about the nature of cognition, affect and the relations between them. They are typically both individualising

and individualist, conceiving of cognition and appraisal as largely solitary processes conducted by monads (Sampson, 1983). They are also largely disembodied, and hence Cartesian dualist, since the appraisals they posit are informational in character and could be processed equally by silicon and wire as by flesh and blood (Cromby, 2015). Whilst these problems differ from those engendered by the basic emotion paradigm they are no less pernicious, and - in our view - mean that cognitive appraisal theories are not adequate to Leys' purpose of refusing separations between cognition, affect and meaning. In what follows we therefore propose an alternative psychology which may be more suitable, drawn from the work of Whitehead and Langer and taking feeling as its base concept.

### **A Psychology of Feeling**

The philosophies of Alfred North Whitehead and his former student Susanne Langer provide a view of experience which understands it as primordially constituted by feelings. Whilst there are significant differences between these philosophers – most obviously, that Whitehead's project was metaphysics whereas Langer aimed to develop a philosophy of mind – there are also deep continuities. Lachmann (1997) shows that Langer accorded great importance to metaphysics, seeing it as at least immanent in every project of understanding. He also draws parallels between Langer's account of presentational symbolism and Whitehead's notions of causal efficacy and presentational immediacy, and between her concept of the 'act' and Whitehead's concept of the 'actual occasion'. With respect to feeling, both Whitehead and Langer treat it from a process orientation and accord it central significance, differing primarily – as we shall see – with respect to its putative specificity for organic being. Nevertheless, our purpose here is not to unify Whitehead and Langer, simply

to show how their emphasis upon feeling – rather than affect – might address the problems Leys identifies.

## **Feeling**

Whitehead and Langer agree that we must not treat feelings (which for Whitehead are synonymous with what he calls ‘positive prehensions’) as entities of any kind. ‘Feel’ is a verb. To say that what is felt is ‘a feeling’ is a deception of language. ‘Feeling’ is a verbal noun – a verb made into a noun – and, as such, precipitates an entity out of a process. To feel is an activity (to do something) not to have something, even though “to ‘have’ a feeling, a sensation, a fear or an idea, seems a perfectly equivalent way of conceiving the fact expressed by the verb” (Langer, 1967, p. 20). For both Whitehead and Langer, ‘mind’ is most fundamentally a function of the activity of feeling so it, too, is a process, not an entity. Feeling is both generated by the body in the world and constitutive of mind, so that:

“the human individual is one fact, body and mind. This claim to unity is the fundamental fact of human existence, always presupposed, rarely explicitly formulated: I am experiencing and my body is mine.” (Whitehead, 1938/1966, p. 159)

Hence, there can be no human experience without a human body. We see with our eyes, taste with our tongue, smell with our nose, touch with our skin, and so forth. When our body is functioning healthily we may enjoy life relatively unhindered by it, although we are always both constrained and enabled by our bodies. When they alert us to some kind of need (hunger, a full bladder, etc.), a function breaks down or is disrupted (e.g. stomach-ache or eye-strain), or when they are the centre of especially pleasant or noxious sensations (perhaps sexual stimulation, or pain), we ‘notice’ our bodies more. But there is never a (waking) moment when we are not feeling our body and feeling with it.

Both Whitehead and Langer were concerned to purge their philosophies of dualisms and reifications. Hence, as well as emphasising the process character of feeling, Langer also emphasises how feeling is nothing other than a ‘phase’ of the body under certain conditions. There is no additional entity – feeling – that gets added to the body: there is simply the dynamic body, some activities of which include a felt aspect. She explains this using the analogy of an iron bar: “When iron is heated to a critical degree it becomes red; yet its redness is not a new entity which must have gone somewhere else when it is no longer in the iron. It was a phase of the iron itself, at high temperature” (Langer, 1967, p. 21). Feeling resembles the redness of the iron: it emerges as an aspect or quality of the body in certain conditions, or when one or more of its processes are operating at a certain level or rate: “One may say that some activities, especially nervous ones, above a certain (probably fluctuating) limen of intensity, enter into ‘psychical phase’. This is the phase of being felt” (Langer, 1967, p. 22).

Conceptualised this way, feeling is not simply the same as affect or emotion. Although it includes the bodily aspects of emotion, it also includes the felt aspects of many other processes: both those we conventionally describe as embodied or affective, and those we conventionally categorise as mental or cognitive. Its dynamics therefore incorporate all of the intensities and valences attributed to affect within the affective turn, but without erecting boundaries between these and other aspects of experience. Feeling is the primordial texture of being, the continuous and most fundamental stuff of which *all* experience is woven, such that: “the entire psychological field – including human conception, responsible action, rationality, knowledge – is a vast and branching development of feeling” (Langer, 1967, p. 23).

This might seem like an overstatement, because when we reflect upon our experiences feelings are not always prominent. But this does not prove that every moment of our



experience is not co-constituted by feeling. Rather, it demonstrates that because feelings are continuously present they often sink into the background and suffuse experience with an overall tone or mood. Also, relatively few feelings get seized upon, symbolised, reflected upon, and therefore remembered. Moreover, all feelings are of the body; their significances are known immediately and corporeally, in the lived moment; they are often fleeting and subtle; and they always lack symbolic form. This distinct combination of characteristics means that feelings are frequently not noticed or quickly forgotten:

“The real patterns of feeling – how a small fright, or ‘startle’, terminates, how the tensions of boredom increase or give way to self-entertainment, how daydreaming weaves in and out of realistic thought, how the feeling of a place, a time of day, an ordinary situation is built up – these felt events, which compose the fabric of mental life, usually pass unobserved, unrecorded and therefore essentially unknown to the average person. It may seem strange that the most immediate experiences in our lives should be the least recognised, but there is a reason for this apparent paradox, and the reason is precisely their immediacy. They pass unrecorded because they are known without any symbolic mediation and therefore without conceptual form.” (Langer, 1967, p. 57)

## **Reasoning**

Whilst for both Langer and Whitehead experience is most fundamentally constituted of feeling, this is not all there is. Humans have the capacity to symbolise or ‘objectify’ feeling (imperfectly and partially) using art and language. We also have the capacity of intuition, in the Lockean sense of perceiving relations, forms and instances: capacities which implicate other faculties, such as remembering. So experience also consists of other processes, but these are always inflected by, or co-constituted through, feeling:

“Sheer conceptions evoke emotions, emotions focus and intensify attention, attention eventuates in symbolic expression that formulates more conceptions and sustains or reshapes emotion; so the conceptual frame in which we feel our own activity and the impingements of outward events grows larger as long as the emotive and intellectual processes keep pace with each other in a dialectical advance, rhythmically self-sustaining like all major organic functions.” (Langer, 1967, p. 130)

In its process, reason is therefore not separate from emotion: although reason is also constituted of other elements and processes, these are continuously inflected with the emotional feelings of the living body. More than this, intuition *itself* is constituted from feelings – for example, of connection, disjunction, obstruction or association (Johnson, 2007) – it depends upon “characteristic feelings, especially of strain and expectation, vagueness and clearness, ease and frustration, and the very interesting ‘sense of rightness’ that closes a finished thought process” (Langer, 1967, p. 147). So not only is reason bound up with emotion, intuition requires feeling as well as semantic manipulation and differentiation. We don’t just interpret what words (for example) mean, we also *feel* how they do (or don’t) connect, flow, associate, imply, contradict, gloss, suggest, connote and so on. In the lived processes of reasoning, words and symbols objectify felt intuitions: having done so they immediately become objects for further contemplation and interrogation, and may immediately excite further feelings – which may themselves be almost immediately objectified.

As we have seen, within the affective turn there is a gap between affect, meaning and intentionality, a gap which may reflect wider cultural presuppositions concerning the distinctions between logic, intellect and reason on the one hand, and feeling, emotion and passion on the other. Langer argues that in presuming this divide we erroneously treat reason as a kind of “constant, standard competence” (1967, p. 148), akin to the processing power of

a computer, and always available to be used instrumentally – for example, to conduct appraisals. This is wrong, because the symbolic activities and felt intuitions of reason are themselves subject to spontaneous excitation and emotional activation in a continuously unfurling process. There is no separable faculty of cognition, no cognitive overseer to conduct appraisals that give meaning to affect. The notion that reason and emotion, cognition and affect are *already* distinct misleads us into imagining that in everyday life we have two options: to strike an appropriate balance between them, or to ‘rationalise’ our actions by concealing our base, emotive aims within superficial chains of pseudo-logic. In contrast, “the wide discrepancy between reason and feeling may be unreal; it is not improbable that intellect is a high form of feeling – a specialised, intensive feeling about intuitions” (Langer, 1967, p. 149).

### **Intentionality**

All experience, then, is co-constituted by feeling, and there is no independent faculty of reason or cognition. Reasoning and intellect are precipitated from and suffused by feeling processes that give them direction, purpose, valence and motivational force. At the same time, however:

“our immediate experience also claims derivation from another source, and equally claims a unity founded upon this alternative source of derivation. This second source is our own state of mind directly preceding the immediate present of our conscious experience. A quarter of a second ago, we were entertaining such and such ideas, we were enjoying such and such emotions, and we were making such and such observations of external fact. In our present state of mind, we are continuing that previous state.” (Whitehead, 1938/1966, p. 160)

Actually, the word ‘continuing’ only half fits Whitehead’s intention because “we do not quite continue in our preceding state of experience. New elements have intervened” (1938/1966, p. 160). Because we are continuously feeling our body and feeling with it, the body provides new elements in each successive moment of experience. In the present moment, the new elements of experience provided by our body are fused with those constituting our immediately prior experience (elements that include intuitions and symbols, as well as feelings). Our very being consists of a continuous flow of such moments, or *actual occasions*, of experience.

For Whitehead, an actual occasion of experience is constituted by prehensions. ‘Prehension’ is defined as a kind of “uncognitive apprehension”. To prehend is to seize or take hold of: it signifies how the world is taken into, or grasped by (or within) an actual occasion of experience. To be more precise, it is ‘propositions’ – integrations or hybrids of pure potentialities (eternal objects) and actualities – that are taken into experience. Whitehead poetically describes propositions as “the tales that might perhaps be told of particular actualities” (1927-8/1978, p. 256). Therefore, any actual occasion includes both the world and the way in which it gets prehend:

“A prehension reproduces in itself the general characteristics of an actual entity: it is referent to an external world, and in this sense will be said to have a ‘vector character’; it involves emotion, and purpose, and valuation, and causation. In fact, any characteristic of an actual entity is reproduced in a prehension.” (Whitehead, 1927-8/1978, p. 19)

Whitehead divides prehensions into two types: positive and negative. Positive prehensions are also termed feelings; negative prehensions serve the purpose of ‘eliminating from feeling’. Positive prehensions have subjective forms because they contribute positively

to the concrescence, or constitution, of the actual occasion (and the subject of whose experience it is part). Negative prehensions have subjective forms because they hold their “datum as inoperative in the progressive concrescence of prehensions constituting the unity of the subject” (Whitehead, 1927-8/1978, p. 23): they subtract from what is experienced subjectively, producing something unfelt that might otherwise have been felt, and in this way also contribute to the subjective form of experience. Propositions only exist as entertained in experience. Their primary function is to operate as a ‘lure for feeling’, so that:

“some propositions are the data of feelings with subjective forms such as to constitute those feelings to be the enjoyment of a joke. Other propositions are felt with feelings whose subjective forms are horror, disgust, or indignation.” (Whitehead, 1927-8/1978, p. 25)

Effectively, then, propositions are material-semiotic hybrids that both incite and entrain the felt interests that are constitutive of the experiences of subjects.

Gier (1976) shows that Whitehead’s concept of prehension closely resembles the concept of primordial intentionality developed by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. He demonstrates that both concepts owe something to William James’ feelings of relation and tendency; both reject substance metaphysics and emphasise becoming, temporality and process; and both emphasise the *internal* relations between the world as it appears and the subject for whom it appears. Consequently:

"Both prehension and intentionality describe the relationship of a subject and an object in such a way as to overcome this subject-object split. In the same way that intentionality is always 'consciousness of an object,' prehension is always 'feeling of some datum. This means that any prehensive unification or intentional act is codetermined by the respective data." (Gier, 1976, p. 201)

So the prehensive relation between subject and object *constitutes* the subject, whilst at the very same time it constitutes the object as *that* object for *that* subject on *that* actual occasion: we feel in relation to the object in the situation. Likewise, primordial intentionality describes the spontaneous, pre-reflective organisation of experience by aspects of the world that are given and present, a co-organisation of world and subjective sensorium preceding any subsequent reflection or appraisal. So, rather than feeling being dependent upon prior cognitive appraisal for intentionality, feeling is *already* intentional because it is already one of the multiple, simultaneous processes that jointly establish subject and object as mutually constitutive elements in the particularity of a given moment. In human experience these constitutive processes operate alongside and within refined or higher processes, themselves in part constituted from feeling, which for Langer's work involves emphases upon symbolisation and intuition, and for Whitehead perception and remembering.

At this point the differences between Langer and Whitehead begin to be relevant, because Whitehead's prehensions are a broader category than Langer's feelings, which she conceives more narrowly as specifically organic. Whitehead is sometimes described as a pan-experientialist: he uses the term 'experience' for every kind of activity between every kind of entity – including, for example, activities solely involving sub-atomic particles. Consequently, much prehensive activity is non-conscious, and indeed is conducted by entities incapable of reflexive consciousness: "consciousness is the crown of experience, only occasionally attained, not its necessary base" (Whitehead, 1927-8/1978, p. 267). Langer, by contrast, reserves 'experience' for instances of awareness. She does not draw a sharp line between human experience and forms of felt awareness in other creatures, nor does she challenge Whitehead's arguments: she simply reserves the term 'experience' for living organisms, treating it as an emergent property of biological processes. Consequently, she treats feeling as an organic achievement, rather than equating it with prehension in general.

Because of her emphasis on the organic, and within this the specifically human, Langer's account of feeling therefore includes a very limited psychodynamic component. It is limited firstly in that she describes the theoretical basis of psychoanalysis as over-assumptive and the Freudian unconscious as a reification (Langer, 1967, pp. 22-23). Secondly, as we have noted, for Langer many feelings are simply not noticed, rather than unconscious: they come, go, and bear whatever influence they carry, without our necessarily attending to them. Third, Langer positions the psychodynamics of feeling subordinately to a more general account of how we are "overburdened ... not only with excessive sensibility, but also too many emotive impulses, certainly more than can be freely, overtly spent, especially in the social context of human life" (Langer, 1972, p. 277). So on the one hand our dynamic bodies generate many more impulses toward feeling than we can materially realise; and on the other, some felt impulses are more likely than others to encounter normative censure. From Langer's perspective, then, what Whitehead calls negative prehensions include what is negated in accord with convention, and also what is contingently precluded by the fluctuating spatio-temporal constraints of what is materially possible. So for both philosophers, what is felt is never all of what *could* be felt, but what is felt – prehended – is always constitutive of our already meaningful and intentional relation with the world, as it develops through the procession of successive moments – actual occasions – that constitute experience.

Despite their differences, then, Langer and Whitehead converge upon a view of feeling as the most basic constitutive element of experience, the very stuff from which (what we call) cognition and (what we call) emotion get subsequently differentiated. Felt prehensions – how the world is for us, right here, right now, within *these* activities – constitute us, at the same time as they constitute our world. This avoids the dualism highlighted by Leys, because in actual occasions of experience there is a unity of body and mind in which subject and object constitute one another. Furthermore, feelings are already

intentional, already meaningful – albeit that their *complete* meaning only gets realised in their lived, contingent conjunctions with the signs, symbols, words, events and activities that interpellate them and which they continuously suffuse (Ruthrof, 1997). A focus on feeling therefore avoids the problems of intentionality associated with both the basic emotions paradigm and the affective turn, whilst also avoiding the need to endorse individualistic, disembodied theories of cognitive appraisal.

Feeling is relational, and what is eliminated from feeling by negative prehensions may also be in accord with convention and material constraints: therefore, what is felt is tied to social, cultural, historical, biographical, and (most importantly, for the present argument) ideological influences. We will now demonstrate this by returning to Massumi's influential example of the Reagan presidency. Our aim is not to make a significant contribution to the voluminous literature on this topic: merely to demonstrate that analyses of feeling can be coherently linked with analyses that are more conventionally ideological.

### **The Reagan Incipience, Revisited**

For Massumi, Reagan's electoral success depended on the affective projection of a protean air of confidence, often conveyed through the quality of his voice, which enabled him to universalise his appeal and somewhat neutralise the otherwise toxic consequences of his policies. In reconsidering this claim, we begin with our previous observation that Massumi does reference the conventional discursive and narrative meanings of Reagan's presidency. That is, even Massumi needs a contrast between what Reagan *said* and how he *was* in order to make a case for the affective character of his electoral successes.



The word ‘incipience’ refers to beginnings, emergence, the initial appearance of something, and its use signals the prominence of notions of becoming in Massumi’s work. And yet, from the process perspective we have outlined, it seems that Massumi’s analysis of the Reagan incipience perhaps begins too late. Raphael (2009) describes how Reagan’s two high profile careers, in Hollywood and then in politics, were interdependent and were both facilitated by childhood experiences of community drama, faith performances in church services, and an initial career in radio; hence he proposes that there are numerous ways in which “Reagan’s political achievements were directly linked to his prior training as a cultural performer” (Raphael, 2009, p. 7). Like Massumi, Raphael pays considerable attention to Reagan’s voice, describing how it was trained, coached and refined. He also highlights Reagan’s early awareness of the centrality of performativity to citizenship, and the ways in which Reagan’s initial political involvements (notably his 1964 voice-over for an advertisement supporting Senator Barry Goldwater), together with his role as host of the ‘General Electric Television Theatre’, helped forge a ‘Reagan brand’ with distinctive affective elements. He claims that, by 1980, Reagan’s voice was “hardwired into the American psyche” (Raphael, 2009, p. 61), and consistently argues that the performative and vocal skills that Reagan acquired and honed were central to this.

There are actually (at least) two elements here: both the skillset Reagan developed, including his carefully crafted voice and the confidence he learned to make it exude; and his extensive media work, which yielded a fertile bed of connotative meanings – felt, discursive, symbolic – that helped fuel his presidential success. Raphael’s analysis suggests a range of prehensive potentials that could have come into play whenever Reagan made a speech or appeared on television. The actual occasions of the Reagan presidency, the specific encounters for individuals with his image or voice, were prehensively constituted by associations between Reagan’s current appearance and his previous appearances; by

associations between his polished, performative character and his direct-to-camera addresses to voters; by implicit parallels between his leading statesman role and his heroic film roles, or between his genial television host persona and his exemplification of the national body politic. None of these associations were simply discursive, simply symbolic or simply felt: all were jointly achieved as mutually constitutive elements spanning past and present, politics and performance, symbolism and feeling.

Massumi is right, therefore, to emphasise how Reagan's success depended in part upon an affectively communicated air of confidence: indeed, this is widely agreed by analysts. However, just as anger can be 'hot' or 'cold', so confidence can be brash, assertive and loud; calm, quiet and certain; or somewhere between. Reagan traded primarily in a relaxed, self-assured confidence that, we suggest, was conveyed so effectively precisely because it already presumed what was frequently prehended in its multiple fluctuating instantiations. Reagan's confidence was communicated not just by the present elements of the actual occasions of his presidency, nor just by his highly developed performative skills and professionally trained voice, but also through the many prehensive feelings – associated with his history, brand and public persona – that his image and voice brought in their trail.

At the same time, Leys is right to point to the gap that Massumi's analysis leaves between these felt meanings and more conventional analyses of belief, ideology and desire. Massumi's treatment of affect as prepersonal makes it difficult to understand how vocal or performative signifiers of affective influence could be deliberately worked up in social practice: if affect is before experience, it cannot readily be the target of reflexive development. In contrast, a focus on feeling facilitates analyses that permits these forms of work to be included, analyses which reveal the felt elements of the Reagan persona to be just as ideological as his neoliberal policies. Noting that Reagan often played the part of masculine heroes in Westerns and war films, Stein (2010) draws out the ideological

associations between the neoliberalism Reagan championed and the tropes of individualism, freedom from regulation and heightened personal and moral responsibility that such heroic action figures embody:

“Reagan’s tough cowboy style meshed well with the individualist implications of neoliberalism, and he managed to pitch his reforms to the public as an expansion of an already American ideology”. (Stein, 2010, p. 70)

Toughness, freedom and heroic masculinity are all propositions that lure feelings which favour particular subjective forms. They are highly amenable to prehensive mobilisations constitutive of subjects who, interpellated this way, might experience themselves as shadowy embodiments of screen heroes, whose affective traces constituted *them* at the same time as, simultaneously, it constituted the Reagan persona *for* them. The realm of morality is thoroughly imbued with affect and feeling, and Reagan’s presidential rhetoric had a strongly moral character – albeit that its morality was one in which freedom (individual and corporate) was the highest value, such that its pursuit provided rhetorical justification for military interventions in Nicaragua, Grenada and elsewhere. In particular, Reagan’s profoundly ideological portrayals of the Soviet Union as an ‘evil empire’ consistently traded in the moral rectitude of the confident, masculine hero who opposes oppression with personal strength and unshakeable conviction.

Feelings of confidence in Reagan, prehensively constituted, were therefore already both intentional and ideological. On the one hand they were about his history, brand and image; and on the other, about the ways in which his carefully cultivated embodied character accorded with the ideology he promoted. Our analysis of feelings, rather than affect, allows us to address a more substantial temporal frame; to incorporate the reflexive development of signifiers and practices of feeling; to recognise how feelings mesh with other sources of

meaning (discourses, symbols, images, films, memories) to co-constitute present moments of experience; and thus permits a more thorough and nuanced analysis of the felt or affective dimensions of ideology and politics.

Much more could nevertheless be said about the felt aspects of the Reagan presidency. For example, we might have considered how his air of confidence facilitated the negative prehension of widespread discontent associated with the decline of manufacturing and the re-structuring of the economy in favour of finance. We could have explored the links between the increasingly mediated character of politics in the 1980's and the ways in which what Williams (1972) called 'structures of feeling' – historically specific affective sensibilities, emergent in given periods and co-constitutive of their political dynamics – perhaps became more dependent upon technology and performance than in previous eras. Likewise, because from this perspective reasoning is already enmeshed with feeling, rather than simply observe that, for many, support for Reagan was 'irrational', it might be possible to understand how, for specific individuals or groups, their support was locally rational: in this way, enduring political and ideological questions might be addressed. But our intention was not to conduct such analyses: simply to show how they are facilitated by a conceptual focus on feeling rather than affect.

### **Conclusion**

In endorsing Leys' (2011b) critique of the affective turn and presenting an alternative psychology of feeling we do not wish to throw out the baby with the bath water. That is, we see value in affect scholarship in at least two ways - albeit that we also hold that notions of feeling derived from Whitehead and Langer would serve equally for these purposes. First, affect theorists should be commended for emphasising the purposive or incidental

manipulation or inculcation of material intensities along with their impact upon living bodies. As Seyfert (2012) notes, affects emerge in situations of encounter and interaction between bodies (both human and non-human) and, therefore, cannot be reduced to any individual. He coins the term *affectif* “to capture this social and heteronomous quality of affect and affective bodies” (Seyfert, 2012, p. 33). This concept collapses the binary between bodiless ‘atmosphere’ and body (e.g., Brennan, 2004), recognising that there cannot be an atmosphere without bodies – an *affectif* is the entirety of all bodies present. Seyfert gives the example of the picture-observer relation, in which affect cannot be reduced to either side; both picture and observer need to be co-present. Affects emerge during the encounter of bodies; they are *intensive interactions*. We read this as suggesting that affect is the corporeal-sensing – the feeling - of the intensities of interactions between all bodies of the *affectif*. This move highlights a material dimension of experience often downplayed in (or absent from) recent theorising in psychology and social science. In so doing, it renders visible some under-recognised aspects of political dynamics and their processes of influence and control; and provides a (tentative, partial) link between the cultural and the physiological.

Second, affect theorists sometimes emphasise how feelings are implicated in bringing an indeterminate future into the present. Massumi (2010), for example, describes a political ontology of threat within which tension and anxiety are inculcated and maintained in such a way that a virtual future becomes instantiated as an actual influence in the lived present. This occurs when the present becomes suffused with affective tones of dread toward possible negative or harmful futures. Feelings therefore actualise potential futures as powerful constituents within current thought and decision-making processes. Ideas, images and talk of terror, for example, can establish an immanent vibratory fabric of tensions and felt potentials that compels and structures present political discourse, and which also - and perhaps more significantly - encourages acquiescence to political practices and surveillance technologies

allegedly deployed to neutralise imminent threats. Anticipated futures and their associated feelings are nevertheless not negative and anxiety-laden by default - as Ellis and Tucker (2002) note, they can also include the felt indication of a positive future yet to be made: what, in English, is generally called hope.

Whilst the approach outlined here concentrates on feeling as a constituent of experience, we must emphasise that bodily potentials need not (fully) enter awareness to have influence. We argue, therefore, that sharp distinctions between, on the one hand, what is felt and (potentially) linguistically recognised, and, on the other hand, what operates beyond experience as affect that *necessarily* exceeds awareness are probably unnecessary and sometimes misleading. It is possible, we suggest, to conduct analyses with reference to a notion of feeling that is never reducible to the sociolinguistic but nevertheless runs parallel with and is immanent within it. Since feeling constitutes experience – as opposed to merely being one aspect of it – even unfelt feelings (negative prehensions) structure it. But unfeeling (and its consequences) never happens in a social or relational vacuum: the feeling body is always in the world. Accordingly, distinctions between what is felt and what is not are often dynamic and responsive: what was negatively prehended (unfelt) in an antecedent actual occasion of experience might be prehended (felt) again in the present, only to become negatively prehended (unfelt) once more in the next occasion. Such oscillations regulate how feeling constitutes experience according to how it is organised, interpellated or lured, impelled or compelled, motivated, oriented, directed and interpreted.

In conclusion, our account of Whitehead and Langer's philosophies demonstrates how they avoid the need to posit cognitive appraisals in order to understand the intentionality of the affective realm. At the same time, they provide a conceptual basis within which the felt, emotional aspects of politics might be included within analyses of the workings of ideology. This potentially closes the intentionality gap that Leys incisively identifies, whilst retaining

the focus on affect and feeling that Massumi, and other scholars associated with the affective turn, have shown to be interesting and fruitful.

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