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# A Sense of Relation: Defining 'Affect'

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## Abstract

Despite being a relatively popular subject of enquiry among the social sciences and humanities in recent decades, 'affect' remains an elusive phenomenon. This paper, rather than trace the development of affect theory in order to pick apart the work of previous scholars, instead explores research that has – implicitly or explicitly – tied affect(s) to relations and relationality. Engaging with anthropological theories of affect and relationships as a form of 'empirical philosophy,' as well as with ethnographic data from my own fieldwork, this work seeks to provide that which has eluded previous theorists of affect: a definition of the phenomenon that is broad enough to cover its many aspects, while remaining concise enough for practical application. In doing so, I come to define affect as no more or less than, *the experiential aspect of relationality*.

Keywords: Affect, Relationality, Anthropology, Collective effervescence

## Introduction: Punk Affects

The room is dark and warm, and roughly square. At one end is a stage, standing at about waist-height, while opposite it is a booth containing sound and lighting equipment, and a small, curved counter which acts as both reception and bar. This is one of Japan's many 'livehouses'<sup>1</sup> (small-scale, independent live music venues – see Namai 2019), located in a not-very-salubrious neighbourhood in Sapporo, the main city on Japan's northernmost island of Hokkaido. The basement room has around 50 people in it who are variously chatting, buying or drinking cans of beer, or simply catching their breath. Four of the city's local hardcore punk bands have performed already and everyone is waiting for the final band. The headline act are very popular in the local punk community and beyond, being one of the representative artists of 'Japacore' (Japanese-style hardcore punk – see Letson 2021; 2022), who have been active in the international underground punk scene for almost four decades. There is a particular anticipation hanging in the air; after being on hiatus for two-and-a-half years due to COVID-19-related restrictions, the band are returning to the stage.

The musicians appear and start casually tuning their instruments and checking the sound. A few stray cheers and whistles emerge from the crowd as a kind of pressure seems to build in the air. The vocalist appears, steps up

to the microphone and offers a casual greeting, "hey! It's been a while."<sup>2</sup> Distorted electric guitar chords blast out of the speakers and the drummer explodes into a hectic beat. The audience cheers and the twenty-or-so people nearest the front of the stage bunch closer together, pumping their fists and moving their bodies in time with the music's rapid tempo. Two people right in front of the stage start 'moshing' – shoving, pushing, and smashing into each other with aggressive, violent bodily contact (see Overell 2014; Riches 2011). Another person joins them, then another, soon six or seven people are involved and I feel a compunction to lend myself to the fray.

As I push my way through the crowd towards the 'mosh pit' (the name given to the area immediately in front of the stage where most moshing occurs), I recognise one of the participants as an important interlocutor, informant, and fieldwork collaborator. His help, advice, and information have been invaluable to my anthropological research on the punk community in Sapporo. I grab his shoulder from behind and shove him, hard. He careens into another moshers and bounces back into me. His face splits into a wicked grin as he takes hold of my arms and swings me towards the biggest knot of activity. Soon we are all cannoning off each other in a chaotic mess of limbs, hair, and sweat. Some of the impacts are hard enough to raise bruises the next day, but in the moment nobody seems to care.

Not all the audience react in this manner, however.

1 ライブハウス (raibuhausu).

2 や、久しぶり! (ya, hisashiburi).

Indeed, as far as I was able to count from my in-the-thick-of-it vantage point, there were never more than seven or eight people in the mosh at any one time. Some left, others joined, most moshed until the end of the song. The majority of the audience choose to enjoy and participate in the show in different ways. While a small circle opens up in the crowd to simultaneously accommodate and contain the violence of the mosh pit, those outside it move their bodies, nod their heads, pump their fists, cheer, clap, tap their feet, sing along, cross their arms, drink beer, or enact some combination of any or all of the above.

How do we explain these differences in behaviour? How should we interpret the physical aggression of myself and my fellow moshers towards our friends and peers? How do we account for those that chose not to join the mutual violence? Everyone in that space experienced the same stimuli; the same atmosphere, the same music, the same sights and smells. Everyone had been waiting for this during the privations of COVID-19 and everyone who was there had deliberately chosen to be there. Everyone there knew each other, and was familiar with the music of the band. I have been conducting ethnographic fieldwork with the Sapporo punk community for over 3 years, and I did not notice anyone there that night who was ‘new’ or ‘unknown’ to the scene. All of the participants were active and committed members of the same subcultural community, and thus all had at least a level of shared, embodied, cultural knowledge regarding the music, its style and themes, and the meanings of these vis-à-vis community identity. As such knowledge forms the basis of subcultural identity and belonging (Haenfler 2014; Thornton 1995), and as music and dance is such a powerful tool for the realization of social integration (Durkheim 1995; Turino 2008), it would be reasonable to expect most – if not all – of the crowd at the livehouse to be caught up in the ‘collective effervescence’ (Durkheim 1995 – see below) of the mosh. However, only a very few found themselves swept up in such a manner by the intensity of the moment. So why and how did this shared experience result in such an array of physical reactions? Clearly the live music experience works in a complex and non-linear fashion, but what exactly connects the cause with the effect(s)?

The answer lies in understanding *affect*. What affects were at play in the situation at hand, and how did they interact with the body/minds of the audience? If we understand this, then we can understand why people from the same social group may have such different reactions to the same stimulus. However, in order to do this, it is necessary to answer a much more fundamental, and indeed, much more difficult question: what is affect?

## The Big Question: What is Affect?<sup>3</sup>

‘Affect’ has become something of a buzz word in the humanities and social sciences in recent decades (Leys 2017) and anthropology has been no exception. Despite it being the object of a large number of varied studies across disciplines, exactly what affect is and what it means remains open to debate. Broadly speaking, it pertains to the processes through which humans experience and process sensory and emotional stimuli. In psychology, the term is used more-or-less interchangeably with ‘emotion’ (cf Tomkins 1992). However, in the other social sciences, affect is often assiduously separated from it, instead being understood as a “pre-personal” phenomenon (Massumi 2002; Stewart 2007). In other words, it can be understood to be stimuli which have the *potential* to elicit emotion, but *before* they have been cognitively processed as such.

As Brian Massumi puts it, it may be considered “the capacity to affect and be affected” (Massumi 1980 [1987]: xvi). As such, social theorists often place it in opposition to cognition and intellect, being related more to studies of the body, the senses, and the emotions, than to thought and ideas (Leys 2011; 2017). However, as will become clear below, this dichotomous approach has raised more problems than it has solved, and more recent scholarship has sought to illustrate the symbiosis of affect and cognition, rather than their separation.

While current research trends have sought to transcend – or, at the very least, bridge the gap between – the mind/body binary which has been implicit in previous literature, a definition of affect which comprehensively incorporates all the aspects of this phenomenon remains elusive (Lutz 2017). Anthropologists, in particular, with their focus on ground-up theorizing based on long-term participant observation and ethnographic data (Malkki 2007), have long sought an understanding of affect which reflects the complex, nuanced, ‘messy’ realities of everyday human life (for example, Stewart 2007; Nishii & Yanai et al 2020).

In this paper, rather than trace the development of affect-related anthropological theory as an exercise in theoretical genealogy (for such a review, see DeAntoni 2019), I instead engage with it as a form of ‘empirical philosophy’ (Mol 2002: xiii-ix), grappling with the ideas that allow us to ‘think with’ affect (cf Lévi-Strauss 1963). Most studies of affect take as their starting point the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza – most commonly noted as one of the principal opponents of Cartesian philosophy in Europe (cf Deleuze & Guattari 1987; Leys

3 Parts of this paper have been adapted from the author’s Masters thesis (修士論文), which is available on request from Hokkaido University Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences.

2017). While Spinoza does appear in my outline of affect theory, I begin with a consideration of Émile Durkheim's concept of 'collective effervescence.' By starting with arguably the first modern sociological theory to posit a mutual relationship between affect and cognition, I show how affect theory has been inherently concerned with the sensual experience of relationships, even if this has not always been explicitly recognised. From this, I put forward a definition of affect as, 'the experiential aspect of relationality,' which seeks to provide a concise yet comprehensive concept of this fundamental facet of human experience.

### Values of Intensity: Émile Durkheim's 'Collective Effervescence'

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, first published in 1912, Durkheim brings together ethnographic data from a number of sources in a consideration of what he considers to be the most 'basic' or 'primitive' forms of religious activity in human society. While the obvious social evolutionism underpinning this enterprise would be anathema for most current scholars, this work nevertheless provides important insights into the behaviours apparent in the social physicality of communal events. In doing so, he provides a view of collective behaviour as both cause and effect of the interplay between affect and cognition.

For Durkheim, religious, and particularly ritual activity is simultaneously a practice and a representation of a collective mental state. These representative practices are furthermore "the product of an immense cooperation that extends not only through space but also through time" (1995: 15). That is, collective behaviour maintains a group's connections to its shared history and worldview, while at the same time (re)creating the mental and emotional bonds of sociality necessary for such behaviour in the first place. Thus, a collective act is not only a physical affirmation of communal bonds, but also a semiotic representation of the community itself.

At the centre of this concept is the idea of social or collective 'effervescence' (Durkheim 1995). That is, the heightened experience of communality that provides the impetus for crowds or groups to act in ways which in other social contexts would be considered unacceptable, or even immoral (Durkheim 1952). Beyond the religious ecstasies of Durkheim's collective effervescence, the most obvious examples of this phenomenon are rioting, looting and other forms of social unrest, although it is entirely possible to include the musically inspired violence of the mosh pit here, too (see Overell 2014; Riches 2011). In this conception, people are seen as capable of such behaviours only when energized by "a sort of electricity [that] is generated from their

closeness" (Durkheim 1995: 217). Furthermore, this collective intellect, simultaneously effervescing from and transcendent of the individuals involved, is co-constitutive of the physical actions which are both a material manifestation and a semiotic representation of the shared thoughts and experiences of the crowd.

In his earlier work, *Suicide* (1897), Durkheim explains the creation of such a state as a dialectic process. People in close proximity experience the same affective stimulus while also perceiving that those around them have experienced it, as well. This collective psychophysiological experience combines with the semiotic cognition of each individual, who simultaneously imagines that those around them – having experienced the same phenomenon – are concurrently thinking in the same way. Thus, the collective state is born from "a penetration, a fusion of a number of states within another, distinct from them" (Durkheim 1952: 77). In addition, those nearby who are not experiencing this collective mental state may still add to it, by feeling pressured to conform to the emergent social behaviour due to their close proximity to it. In short, collective effervescence may be described as an affectively experienced 'social force' (ibid).

For Durkheim, a social force is a pressure born from the social group, which compels the individual to act in a way that conforms to the norms of said group. Despite pointing out the necessity of what he refers to as an individual's personal 'disposition' in determining how one is affected by social forces, Durkheim consistently frames his ideas in a way which infers that the individual has no real power to resist them (cf Durkheim 1952: 75; 1995: 367-369). Such pressures are vaguely defined and 'felt,' rather than understood. As such, in contemporary understandings they can be considered to be affective in nature (Mazzarella 2009).

As Giddens (1976) has pointed out, such a view reduces individual agency to the point where it becomes practically non-existent. The implication of Durkheim's theories is that the moment one enters a group, one is no longer able to act as one would when alone. If one considers this point in tandem with the micro-social theories of scholars such as Erving Goffman (1956), or the socio-ecological theories of Gregory Bateson (2000) or Bruno Latour (1993) in which individual agents (human and/or non-human) are constantly acting in relation to one another, it may be considered true, up to a point. However, it denies that people possess the agency to act strategically within the group in order to pursue their personal goals. Thus, while it is possible to view society as a *sui generis* phenomenon which applies certain forces and pressures on its members, it is also certain that its relationship with those individual members is not as simple or as one-way as Durkheim infers.

Furthermore, as Gross (2006) and Lukes (2007) highlight in their comparisons of Durkheim with the philosophy of John Searle (1995), social forces are posited as the results of the group's ability to assign power and status to objects or people that are separate from their 'natural' meaning. Such an argument rests on the notion that this representation is founded wholly on the semiotic power of symbolic language (Gross 2006). As such, in much the same way as he prioritised the social at the expense of the individual, so too does Durkheim give primacy to the linguistic (and, by extension, the cognitive) over the affective and the sensual.

Despite these criticisms, to which careful attention must be paid, it is clear that his work provides an ideal starting point from which to consider problems related to the affective nature of sociality. In particular, his view that the emergence of a given collective behaviour stems from a process which is simultaneously sensual and cognitive, affective and semiotic (Mazzarella 2009). Although it is imperative that anyone who seeks to follow this theoretical approach does not give primacy to one over the other.

### **Networks and Relations: From the 'Social' to the 'Ecological'**

The first scholar to attempt an approach which deliberately sought to synthesize affect and cognition was, arguably, anthropologist Gregory Bateson. In his early ethnographic monograph, *Naven* (1958), Bateson uses the eponymous ritual of the Iatmul people of Papua New Guinea to explore, analyse, and explicate both the cultural 'ethos' of the Iatmul, as well as what he terms their 'eidōs.' The former word is borrowed from the work of Ruth Benedict, who coined the term to describe the dominant personality traits within cultural groups, which are both fostered and represented by sociocultural forms and structures (see Benedict 1959). That is, the behaviours and personality traits that are considered desirable by the group, and which manifest themselves through cultural forms such as dance, ritual, art, and so on. The term, *eidōs*, on the other hand, refers to the internal logical schema that define the structure of the group. For instance; rules, laws, 'common sense,' and other codifications of what is and is not acceptable to the group, and the commonly held concepts and understandings which set out how and why things are done in a certain way. This, in turn, feeds back on the traits or characteristics of its ethos. Or, as Bateson puts it, "ethos and eidōs are the *affective and cognitive* aspects of [cultural] personality (1958: 255, my emphasis). In this way, much like Durkheim, Bateson stresses the dual nature of the causes of communal behaviour in

its relation to culture. However, Bateson is also guilty of the same mistake as Durkheim; namely, privileging structural explications of the Iatmul cultural eidōs, over an exploration of the affective ethos, implying a hierarchical relation between the two. To his credit, Bateson himself admits as much in the epilogue of *Naven's* second edition (1958: 280-302).

Following *Naven*, Bateson would go on to expand, revise, and refine his theories, incorporating ideas from psychology, cybernetics, and communications theory. This work culminated in his magnum opus, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, published in 1972, in which he draws together these differing strands of theory to expound an ecological explanation of human behaviour. From research on topics as diverse as psychopathy, cetacean communication, and epigenetics, Bateson builds a concept of the human mind as an ecological aggregate of ideas. The definition of the word, 'idea' in the book is left deliberately vague (see Bateson 2000: 1), although it is clear from his writings that this word can be considered as pertaining to any given immanent or emergent phenomenon. This theory sees thought, behaviour, and even existence as fundamentally relational. That is, no idea or phenomenon would come into being without the specific interactions between all the myriad agents acting in and on a specific place at a specific time. These agents include anything that is exerting some kind of influence on the emergence of the phenomenon in question, such as historicity, genetics, environment, social context, cultural influences, and so on and so forth.

This way of thinking constitutes a significant shift from the scientific positivism of Bateson's predecessors. Here, culture, behaviour, or any kind of phenomenon, human or non-human, is no longer seen as a fait accompli, but as a work in constant progress. Moreover, it is a work that, rather than being embodied in objects, is emergent in the relationships between those objects. Behaviour, for example, is considered by Bateson to be based on processes of communication which occur within overlapping contexts. While some of these contexts (environment, background noise, body language, and so on) can be understood as affective, others (memory, knowledge, experience) are inherently cognitive or semiotic. Thus, Bateson has brought us from a conception of group behaviour as emergent from a social body that is greater than the sum of its parts, to the notion that behaviour, as an immanent phenomenon, is simultaneously emergent from and constitutive of environmental ecologies of which the 'human' is one part among many (ibid).

Bateson's radical approach to explaining human behaviour arguably became one of the main foundations for subsequent anthropological theories related to assemblage and networks of agency which include both human and non-human actors (see, for example, Latour

1993). Moreover, while these ecological networks are arguably similar to Durkheim's transcendent notion of the collective mind, the influence of non-human actors (animate or otherwise) can now be considered an integral part of the behaviours which emerge from any social group. In addition, the idea of the social can be seen to have shifted from one of physical proximity and 'collective effervescence,' to one of emergent *relationality*.

Given that human experience can be considered to be fundamentally relational in nature, it becomes important to define what exactly is meant by the term, 'relational.' Or, in other words, what exactly *is* a 'relationship?' Put very simply, the word indicates a connection or link between multiple, heterogenous phenomena, as well as their mutual influence and/or relevance within this association. Moreover, as Marilyn Strathern (1995) has illustrated, relationships may be understood as not only *complex* (necessarily consisting of multiple elements), but also *holographic* (similar across any order of scale). In this way, a relationship functions simultaneously as both a phenomenological connection and the abstract conception of that same connection. Thus, paying attention to relationships provides a way to bring together the affective with the cognitive, and even the ontological with the epistemological (ibid; Strathern 2020).

However, the theories of Bateson and others do not really go far enough in their acknowledgement of the affective aspect of relationality. There is always the need for researchers (and especially anthropologists and others who rely on empirical fieldwork) to render experience into data, data into analysis, and analysis into concise and understandable conclusions. Hence, it becomes necessary at this juncture to introduce some of the influential theories which deal explicitly with affect, as both an explicit phenomenon and an abstract subject of theory. After doing so, it will become possible to build a more balanced picture of relationality and the role of affect within it.

### **More than a Feeling: Affect, Cognition, Ontology**

In addition to the relational ecologies of Bateson and others, in the latter half of the twentieth century 'affect theory' also emerged to challenge the idea that human experience was solely dependent on the cognitive interpretation and physical (re)production of signs and representations. In Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's philosophical work, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), which arguably popularized the notion of affect, the word is used to denote "a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution

in that body's capacity to act" (Massumi, in Deleuze & Guattari 1987: xvi).

Taking the seventeenth century anti-Descartian philosophy of Baruch Spinoza as their starting point, Deleuze and Guattari pay particular attention to the concept of 'passions;' emotions which are able to exert power or influence over humans due to their externality (Spinoza 2000). For Spinoza (and later for Deleuze and Guattari), cognitive capacity may be disrupted or even destroyed by an external affect when it encounters a human body/mind and manifests as a distinct emotion. Indeed, the only phenomenon with enough power to rid a person of such an emotion is another emotion (Spinoza 2000: 11).

Taking this as a foundation for further theoretical exploration, Brian Massumi's *Parables for the Virtual* (2002), attempts to construct a comprehensive theory of affect. In addition to the aforementioned, Massumi draws on scholarship from literary theory and, in particular, psychology, to expound a notion of affect as an experience of intensity over quality. For Massumi, affect is fundamentally external to the personal, "a nonconscious, never-to-be-conscious autonomic remainder" (Massumi 2002: 25) that exists outside the semiotic and semantic processes through which the individual forms their understanding of the world. Furthermore, by taking this 'autonomy' as the defining feature of affective phenomena, he emphasises its 'potentiality.' That is, the ability of affect to provide a bridge between the virtual (the potential worlds formed in the mind by the imaginations and expectations afforded by the accumulation of life-experience) and the actual (the reality emergent in the outcome of the virtual as it meets the complex stimuli of lived life).

This understanding of affect, in addition to Deleuzian philosophy, draws heavily on psychological notions of affect, particularly the work of Silvan Tomkins and Benjamin Libet. Tomkins' authoritative four volume work (1962; 1963; 1991; 1992) on the psychology of affect remains one of the foundational texts for researchers studying this aspect of human psychology (Frank & Wilson 2020). According to Tomkins, rather than being separate from cognition, the processes of the body's 'affect system' and the 'cognitive system' are fundamentally co-constitutive. Except in the case of psychological disorders, they are completely symbiotic and thus, inseparable (Tomkins 1962). However, rather than feeding into each other directly, they instead work in parallel, each amplifying or dampening the effects of the other as the body/brain autonomically prioritises which stimuli to apply its finite resources to at any given time (Tomkins 1992).

While Massumi takes up Tomkins' notion of affect and cognition acting as mutual amplifiers/dampeners, he uses the work of Libet (1985) to support his insistence

on their separation. Libet showed that humans registered a half-second lapse between deciding on an action and carrying it out. Following Libet's conclusions, Massumi posits that this 'missing half-second' implies that affect and cognition exist in a hierarchical relationship, where affect is the 'raw' or 'natural' stimulus-in-itself which is then amplified or dampened by the brain's cognitive processes, contrary to Tomkins' theory of mutual, co-dependent amplification/dampening. Furthermore, beyond being separate from each other, he also asserts that affect and cognition are systems that – if not exactly contrary to each other – operate at cross purposes, interfering more than augmenting. In his words affect is "an intimation of what comes next," which cognition "runs counter to and dampens" (ibid: 26). Thus, implying that cognition, or semiotic processing, is nothing more than a post-facto attempt to apply an explicable narrative to what was originally a purely autonomic response to an affective stimulus that exists independent of the body experiencing it.

Following Massumi, anthropologist Kathleen Stewart (2007) employed his theories to illustrate the affective nature of agency, as well as the power of affect in the shaping of emergent realities within an everyday context. For Stewart, affect can be likened to an energy that infuses the various bodies that occupy a given space and provide them with the impetus for movement and action, "an animate circuit that conducts force and maps connections" (Stewart 2007: 3). It is, essentially, a substitute for Durkheim's 'social forces.' Nonetheless, despite Stewart's efforts to highlight the grounded nature of affect, it is still very much a phenomenon which is understood to "[be] transpersonal or prepersonal" (Stewart 2007: 128), implying that it is something that exists outside bodies, which must sense and interpret it in order to function agentially.

However, according to historian Ruth Leys (2011), Massumi and his followers cited only psychology research that backs up their notion of the 'non-intentionality' of affect, while ignoring other psychological theories which have challenged this idea (for example, Fridlund 1994; Lazarus & Folkman 1984). In doing so, they have side-lined the inherent interestedness of affect – how it not only moves between actors, but how it is also *moved* by them (Lutz 2017) – and have employed positivist 'scientific' approaches in an implicit hierarchy where the humanities and social sciences are seen to require the 'hard sciences' in order to prove their theories correct (Martin 2013). In short, these scholars have excised affects from the emotions they are inherently tied to and, in doing so, have created a category so abstract it no longer bears much resemblance to the lived experience of human life (Skoggard & Waterston 2015).

Essentially, while they have considered the human

body a receiver, or even, a 'conductor' of affect, they have all-too-often ignored the ability of the body to generate or to charge affects (see Fridlund 1994). Moreover, by insisting on demarcating where the 'natural' flows of affect end and the 'complications' of human cognition begin, they have arguably failed to escape the essentialist dualisms which underpin much of Euro-American modernist thought (Nishii & Yanai 2020). In short, not only have they failed to overcome the body/mind dichotomy, they have further conflated it with the culture/nature divide (cf Descola 2013).

In answer to this problem, sociologist Margaret Wetherell (2012), puts forward a theory of 'affective practice.' Wetherell argues that affect forms a vital component of the everyday practices through which humans produce meaning. In other words, affect is inextricably linked with praxis, and together both are productive of human understanding. Her approach foregrounds humans' roles in the creation of affects, as well as in their reception, and places the body at the point of intersection and interaction where "possibilities and routines become...entangled together with meaning making" (Wetherell 2012: 19). This focus on bodily practice as part of how people simultaneously produce and interpret meaning in response to affect provides a counterbalance to the abstracted potentialities of Massumi-inspired affect theories. It also brings back Durkheim's original point that the affective and the cognitive, the embodied and the intellectual, work in tandem.

Andrea DeAntoni takes this a step further. In his work he builds on the understanding of the duality of affect to develop a practical approach that allows for the complex interplay of body, mind, space, network, discourse, material, self, non-self/other, and environment as experienced through affect. He argues for a focus on 'feeling,' or rather, "feeling with the world" (DeAntoni & Dumouchel 2017: 94; see also DeAntoni & Cook 2019). The plural connotations of this verb (in English, at least), along with the qualifying statement which informs us that it is an action that is done *together*, affords theorists a neat discursive device that pulls together the multiple roles and influences that affect fulfils in the everyday doings and becomings of life (DeAntoni 2019).

If "feeling with the world" provides a practical and operative definition of what affect allows human actors to do, there still remains the problem of clearly defining – in a similarly practical manner – what exactly affect *is*. Anthropologists publishing in the Japanese language have, in recent years, attempted to approach affect theory in a slightly different way. Notably, Nishii and Yanai (2020), by returning to a direct engagement with Spinoza's philosophy, have sought to bypass the influence of Massumi and other scholars who they feel have muddied the theoretical waters. For them,

affect (although they prefer Spinoza's original term, 'affectus') is more than just the "flipside of Western modernist human-centrism"<sup>4</sup> (Nishii & Yanai 2020: 2, my translation), affect is *productive of* existence. It is the experiential process each living thing takes part in when it "takes in that which is outside"<sup>5</sup> (Nishii & Yanai 2020: 3, my translation). In other words, they assert that affect can be understood as the sensual encounter through which living things both experience *and* make sense of the relationality of being. For Yanai, in particular, this notion of affect ties in with animist ontologies of existence as "whole-yet-multiple"<sup>6</sup> (Yanai 2020: 44, my translation), and provides a foundation for understanding the universal pluralities of a nature which is inclusive of – rather than separate from – humanity (see also Descola 2013).

This Japanese answer to 'Western' theorists' so-called, 'turn to affect,' affords a perspective that is simultaneously 'non-Western,' yet acknowledges that in a post-colonial, globalised world, no point of view can ever be fully removed from 'Western' modes of thinking (Navaro 2017). It thus provides a deeper reading of the consequences of Spinoza's philosophy, carrying the notion of affect to its furthest possible conclusion. Moreover, by grounding it in our experience of reality, Nishii and Yanai's concept of affect as being constitutive of processual existence goes some way painting a more generative view of embodied affect. In doing so, they have additionally connected affect to the anthropological understanding of existence (social, natural, or universal) as fundamentally relational.

In this way, we have come back to the entanglement of affect with relationality, as well as with cognition. It has also become obvious that paying attention to affect affords us a way to span the gap between the ontological and the epistemological. Such a potentially broad theory hence requires a definition that encompasses all of its phenomenological aspects, while remaining succinct and clear enough to be practically applicable to the seemingly endless variation of everyday life, even when attempting to theorise with it through the abstractions of academic thought.

### Conclusion: Affect as the Experiential Aspect of Relationality

The point I am making in this paper is not that previous scholars and theorists of affect have been

wrong, or mistaken, but simply that they have each provided a piece of a larger picture.<sup>7</sup> Durkheim showed that the experience of sociality was affective as well as cognitive, *felt* as well as understood. Bateson brought to light the processual and mutually productive nature of relationships, of which affect is a necessary part. Massumi and Stewart highlighted the non-linearity of the relation between affect and cognition, and the importance of affect as potentiality. Wetherell and DeAntoni tied affect to both sensual praxis and to the epistemological, while Nishii and Yanai illustrated its role in ontological world-making. Although each of these theories of affect has had its shortcomings, that does not diminish the importance of what may be learned from them. It would be foolish to throw the baby out with the bathwater – so to speak – by ignoring their contributions to the debate.

It is clear that affect is not only the intensity of potential. Neither is it neatly divisible from the emotions it invokes or the cognitive processes by which and through which it is rendered understandable. It is the sense that some person, object, context or situation matters in some way to the sensor, as well as the emergent experience of that sense. It intimates that either something is coming, something is emerging, or something has manifested. As a phenomenon or event emerges, the affect(s) which heralded it are not so much fulfilled, as translated by the body/mind into an embodied experience. This process may, at first, seem to place affect prior to the emergent experience, however, affect's mutually transformative interactions with the actors involved in its emergent context show that it is not only 'pre-personal,' but also post-personal, intra-personal, and inter-personal.

To put it more simply, affects are constantly changing in both quality and intensity, and are simultaneously infused within, radiate out from, and interact between any given phenomena which are in relation to each other. This, along with the implication that any given stimulus can only be described as 'affective' if there is a feeling body available to encounter it, leads to the conclusion that affect and experience, as well as emotion and cognition, are more than just co-dependent, they are mutually constitutive. In short, affect is what allows us to sense, feel, and experience our relationship with the world around us. By the same token it is also what allows the world around us to experience our being within it. Hence, rather than being merely the *capacity* to affect and be affected, it is more accurate to say that affect is also the *experience* of affecting and being affected.

4 西欧近代的な人間観の裏面 (seiou kindai-teki na ningen-kan no uramen)

5 外部を受け入れる (gaibu wo uke-ireru)

6 全体として「多」なる存在である (zentai to shite "ta" naru sonzai de aru)

7 Of course, there are other pieces of this picture that have not been included here for reasons of time and word-count. For those who wish to know more about anthropological contributions to affect theory, please see DeAntoni (2019) for a concise but authoritative guide.



This more comprehensive theory of affect requires a definition which succinctly encapsulates all the aspects laid out above. I contend that considering affect to be no more or less than *the experiential aspect of relationality* fulfils such a role.

If we return to the mosh pits of Sapporo Punk (as an anthropologist, I feel compelled to return things to ‘the field’), and we consider affect to be at work as the holistic experience of becoming-relations, then the answers to the questions posed at the beginning of this paper start to become clear. All the attendees at the livehouse were members of the city’s punk community, and all had made a conscious decision – and, indeed, paid a modest entrance fee – to be there. All had been waiting to see this particular band return to the stage following the disruption of COVID-19, and all were familiar the band’s music, as well as the idiosyncrasies of Japanese live music etiquette (see Namai 2022) and with the other members of the audience. When thought about in this way, the affective stimuli in-and-of-itself must have been more-or-less the same for all in attendance, so why did we experience them in such diverse ways? Why were so few of us caught up in the collective effervescence-like activities of the mosh pit?

If we consider affect to be both experiential and relational, then it is something much more than some pre-personal, pre-social ‘intensities’ flowing around and through the crowd like electricity through a circuit (*pace* Stewart 2007). It *is* the circuit. Or, more accurately, it is both what connects the components of the circuit *and* what allows them to *sense* that they are connected. Sensing a connection that is familiar allows us to hook that feeling onto cognitive and semiotic processes through which we amplify those feelings through a form of multiplication-by-association and – in effect – supercharge them. As these ‘supercharged’ affects flow out from us (through our movement, breathing, pupil dilation, words, gestures, and so on), they trigger similar processes in others as we are ‘triggered’ in turn. Proximity and physical touch allow for more direct transference of affect without interference from other stimuli. Thus, it becomes easy to imagine how a person may become ‘caught in a mosh,’<sup>8</sup> so to speak.

What about those who were *affected* in a different way? This is where it becomes possible to see affect and cognition’s mutual constitution. For these audience members, their familiarity with what they were experiencing triggered a different set of semiotic associations that worked to *change*, rather than charge, the affects as they encountered them. These changed affects were experienced by others even as others

experienced them, making for an almost exponential set of sub-circuits constantly connecting, disconnecting, reconnecting, swapping and shifting parts and places, amplifying, interfering, and feeding back into each other. These sub-circuits form and shape the larger affective flows within the space as much as they are shaped by them. The experience of the event as it is individually sensed, felt and processed by all those involved, is simultaneously dependent on, while also forming an integral part of, the relationships between all the actors involved.

But what of the issue of potentiality? The sensing of our relationships with the people around us, the performers, the venue staff, the music, and even the performance itself, is not something that only happens in the moment. It is an ongoing conversation of mind, body, and autonomous physiology as we simultaneously remember and anticipate those same relationships before, during, and after the concrete experience-in-itself. As the music blasts from the speakers we remember past times we have heard that same pattern of chords, notes, and lyrics; we recall our interactions and conversations (or lack thereof) with the musicians; and we anticipate where the music will take us and how it will make us feel, as well as how it is making us feel in the here-and-now. We also anticipate and imagine how we *want* to feel (Tsai 2007). In addition to the processes outlined above, we also act in ways that we hope will actualize the affective potential into the form we have anticipated, even though the complexities of relations mean that the results are very rarely realized exactly how we imagined.

By entering the mosh, I was not only caught up in the ‘collective effervescence’ of the moment, I was also deliberately choosing to react to and produce affective flows that I anticipated would enhance both my experience and my relationships. Essentially, I knowingly placed myself in a position where there was a high probability that I would get ‘carried away.’ I did so, partly because I wished to experience that very sensation, but also because I wished to show the musicians the depth and strength of my relief that they were able to return to performing after such a prolonged period of uncertainty. Upon noticing my close collaborator in the mosh, I also had an opportunity to (re)forge my relationship with him in a new fashion; one of shared physical experience.

Thus, while the eventual results of my actions may have rested on the outcomes of variables far too complex and multiple for me to ever hope to calculate accurately, I was still an active player in their actualization. Hence, through affective stimuli we sense our relationships, this sense shapes and informs our reactions, which amplify, interfere with, or change those affects, thus reshaping and reforming our relationships in ways which are sensed, in turn, affectively, reacted to, and so on and so forth.

8 This term was first coined by the heavy metal band, Anthrax, and is the title of a song from their 1987 album, *Among the Living*.

Such an ontological cycle necessarily involves processes of understanding and knowing without which we would not be able to form the very relationships we are sensing. A chicken-and-egg style search for which one is prior is thus, ultimately, fruitless (*pace* Massumi 2002), and serves only to further insist on affect's separation from relational reality, whereas I have shown affect to be an integral and inseparable part of it.

Affect is then, in effect, our *sense of relation* with the world around us. As such, it provides a bridge between minds and bodies, self and other, selves and others, relations and other relations, epistemology and ontology, inside and outside, even the past and the future. It is not just 'good to think with,' or even 'good to feel with,' it is a mutually constitutive component of how we think *and* feel, and how we connect those two together. If we consider relationships themselves to be simultaneously formed by and productive of their components, then affect also forms an essential part of the processes, not only of sense-making, but of world-making. In other words, without sensing that we are in a relationship, there can be no relationship; without relationships, there can be no existence. Affect is thus the phenomenon that allows us to feel and to know that we are alive and in the world, and are intimately involved in its constant (re) creation.

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