

a theory of surplus value centred on the specificity of the commodity labour-power. In the earlier book, 'abstract' labour is socially de-differentiated labour, the product of the division of labour, or a kind of labour 'in general'. In *Capital*, however, labour-power is transformed into a commodity and exchanged: this is what makes it abstract. This is what transforms the theory of value, set out in *Capital*. In other words, in Part One of *Capital* the commodity has always already been to the factory.

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## Radically private and pretty uncoded

Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds, *The Affect Theory Reader*, Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2010. 416 pp., £67.00 hb., £16.99 pb., 978 0 82234 758 3 hb., 978 0 82234 776 7 pb.

Affect theory emerged out of a set of dissatisfactions with dominant modes of analysis in the humanities. Beginning in the mid-1990s there was increasing consensus that the tools and principles of poststructuralism were unable to accommodate or even recognize central facts about human experience: those that did not rise (or fall) to the level of signification. The privilege granted to language in poststructuralism filtered out precognitive modes of awareness that were felt to be more basic, even more real than the ideated forms of linguistic apprehension. Affects constitute a 'level of experience [that] cannot be translated into words without doing violence', Anna Gibbs writes in the new *Affect Theory Reader*. Or, as Patricia Clough suggests in her account of 'The Affective Turn', citing Rei Terada, poststructuralism was "truly glacial" in the pronouncement of the death of the subject and therefore had little to do with affect and emotion'. Clough's concern, of course, is not with a return to the subject, far from it, but rather to show how affect theory does 'death of the author' better than semiotics. 'Affect and emotion', Clough writes, 'point ... to the subject's discontinuity with itself, a discontinuity of the subject's conscious experience with the non-intentionality of emotion and affect.' Affect theory does discontinuity with a difference. According to Clough, the challenge of affect theory, against every other form of inquiry, is to show how 'bodily matter' bears 'information'. This bodily information overruns the information

contained in any linguistic system. Affect 'organizes itself', which means every other form of organization including perception, cognition, signification, meaning, language, representation, self and other are not only entirely separable from affects but secondary to them. You can't get from one to the other: language, no matter how intensely one deconstructs it, will never open onto affect. Affects are of a different ontological order from linguistic representation, so that even the most advanced modes of poststructural analysis end up privileging language and the subjectivity it generates.

*The Affect Theory Reader* shows how affect can be deployed in a range of frameworks, including the neurological, psychological, social, cultural, philosophical and political, and that there is room for debate among these various fields – above all between the Deleuze-inspired writings of Brian Massumi and his followers and those of the more scientifically minded followers of Eve Sedgwick, whose work was formulated in dialogue with affect psychologist Silvan Tomkins – but there is much more room for agreement among the various camps. (For a brilliant critique of the basic assumptions, and evidence, behind both Massumi's and Tomkins's claims about affect, see Ruth Leys's recent essay, 'The Affective Turn: A Critique', in *Critical Inquiry*). And the agreement hinges on a core claim. There is, Massumi declares, 'duplicity of form': every form or image is received by an agent 'spontaneously and simultaneously in two orders of reality, one local and learned or intentional, the other nonlocal and self-organizing'. In other words, humans apprehend the world along two separate *but not equal* tracks: intention and affect, meaning and sense, perception and experience coexist but do not merge or commingle (the latter term in these binaries is always construed 'outside consciousness'). According to Clough, affects are defined in terms of their 'autonomy from conscious perception and language'. So, despite persistent warnings throughout the *Reader* that 'affect and cognition are never fully separable', that there is 'no boundary yet between the body ... and the correlated sign', body and sign are nonetheless functioning, and analysable, on ontologically separate planes, as a matter of 'parallel processing'. The *difference in kind* between affect and meaning, experience and representation, sense and significance, is a categorical assumption of affect theory and one worth interrogating.

Part of the affect theory project is to go back precisely to those poststructuralist masters – at least some of them, Lacan and Derrida, for instance, are conspicuously absent – but more often it is to seek an alternate genealogy in the deeper past. Marx in the *Economic*

and *Philosophic Manuscripts*, Freud's *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, C.S. Peirce's pragmatism, Bergson's *Matter and Memory*, William James's radical empiricism, Walter Benjamin's writings on mimesis, Heidegger's *Being and Time*, George Orwell's *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Primo Levi's memoirs, Henri Lefebvre's and Raymond Williams's sociology – I am citing both the usual suspects and some new arrivals – are redescribed as theories and theorists of affect. In their introduction to the *Reader*, Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth cite Roland Barthes's late lectures, *The Neutral*, as evidence of an affective turn within the stale 'semiotic paradigm'. Barthes calls for attention to the 'shimmer' of an 'affective minimum' (the title of the introduction is 'An Inventory of Shimmers'). Affective states, Barthes writes, 'outplay the paradigm' of dialectics by referring to something 'unprecedented', something that slips through the net of dialectical analysis.

The fact that affects, whatever they are, are 'new' is a point raised by every author of the volume. Sara Ahmed characterizes a basic element of affectivity as being 'more and less open to new things'; Lauren Berlant writes of a 'new atmosphere of new objects'; Ben Highmore suggests that affects constitute 'new sensual worlds'; Ben Anderson describes how affectivity offers a 'promise of a new way to attend to the social or cultural in perpetual and unruly movement'; affects 'open unsuspected possibilities for new ways of thinking, being, and acting', they are for Gibbs 'envisionings beyond the already known'; for Clough affects are 'unexpected, new', contributing to the 'forging of a new body'; while Steve D. Brown and Ian Tucker see affects as affording a 'new space of liberty in the ineffable'. The word 'new' appears no fewer than 110 times in the fourteen essays.

The relentless pursuit of newness emerges from the most cited source in the *Reader*, the collaborative writings of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Brown and Tucker cite Deleuze and Guattari's definition of philosophy as an imperative 'always to extract an event from things and beings, to set up the new event from things and beings, always to give them a new event'. Lone Bertelsen and Andrew Murphie take their cue from Deleuze and Guattari in their philosophical reading of a political incident. In 'An Ethics of Everyday Infinites and Powers: Félix Guattari on Affect and the Refrain' Bertelsen and Murphie consider the 'Tampa affair' of August 2001, in which the Howard administration refused permission for a Norwegian freighter, the MV *Tampa*, carrying 438 rescued Afghans from a distressed fishing vessel floating in

international waters, to enter Australian territory. A central fact of this 'event', for Bertelsen and Murphie, one that far surpassed the '[o]pinions and arguments' around it in importance, was that the boat was painted red. They write:

It becomes the mark, the possibility of a new *event* (a new *virtual potential* for things to happen differently), of a new set of *physical territories* ... and of a new set of *existential territories* (these include ... new modes of living, new laws, new sign systems, ... new emotions and feelings, new powers to affect and be affected). In sum, a new field of expression arises.

(The word 'new' appears eight more times two paragraphs later.) Bertelsen and Murphie support Guattari's claim that '*affect is all there is*', which suggests, they write, an '*aesthetic* approach to politics'. It's an object of aesthetic experience – the red paint on the side of the boat – that both initiates the event and that transcends the 'arguments' made about it. The arguments – about whether one should help the refugees or not, for instance – are always already an effort to 'capture and control affect'. At the bottom of every interpretation, understanding, analysis, meaning, was 'red'. The event meant many things but '*first* it was an uneasy and persistent redness sitting on the horizon'. Affects, that is, are not only ontologically parallel with cognition, they are *prior to it*. Cognition not only logically follows affect (although it is not connected with it), but that cognition doesn't affect affect. All thought is an afterthought. Gibbs simply calls this the 'dependence of cognition on affect and the senses'. Perhaps the most revealing foundationalist claim emerges when Bertelsen and Murphie provide a brief footnote declaring, 'We are not, of course, saying this [red] image was solely responsible for the events surrounding the *Tampa*.' Indeed. While affect 'subtends cognitively mediated representation', as Gibbs puts it, she similarly warns that affect does 'not ever entirely replace or supersede it'!

Even the sceptics of the affective reduction reiterate its terms. Lawrence Grossberg, for instance, wants to reject the aesthetic politics proposed by Bertelsen and Murphie (which he believes originate with Massumi's work), citing the idea that 'you flash these lights [of terror alerts] at people and there is some kind of bodily response.' Massumi's example in the *Reader* is a fire alarm rather than a flashing light. Fire alarms, Massumi writes, citing Peirce, 'act on the nerves of the person' yet they '*assert nothing*'. Grossberg's retort to Massumi's view of bodily response to lights and sounds is succinct: 'Well there isn't [any bodily response]!' Grossberg further warns that

affect is quickly becoming a formula for ‘everything that is non-representational or non-semantic’. And yet Grossberg goes on to describe affect as ‘excess’, something ‘not captured by notions of signification and representation’, something that escapes ‘theories of representation, of meaning, of ideology’. And again, ‘if something has effects that are ... non-representational then we can just describe it as “affect”’. (It’s unclear what kind of work the scare quotes are doing here.) As it turns out, Grossberg’s real objection is not to the notion of affect at all; rather, he believes we should be ‘specifying modalities and apparatuses of affect’ and discerning the difference between the ‘ontological and the “empirical”’ within affective experience. According to Grossberg, Massumi and co. are too quick to conflate the empirical (psychology and culture) with the ontological (the physical body). What’s at stake in this call for more ‘articulations’ and the ‘refusal of any reduction’? And how does this square with his declaration that ‘in the end, it all comes back to affect’?

Grossberg’s critique of the Left’s ‘elitist and vanguardist politics’, for instance, involves a critique of the Left’s prioritizing of economics over (popular) culture. Rather than talking about the ‘changing status, presence, representation, forms, effectivities of the economy,’ rather than trying to ‘diagnose what is new about capitalism’, according to Grossberg we should be seeing that ‘culture is ... a condition of possibility of the economic’. What this looks like is explicitly stated in Seigworth’s introductory discussion of Lefebvre. Rather than examine ‘institutions’, Seigworth writes (he is citing Greil Marcus on Lefebvre), we should examine affective ‘moments of love, poetry ... hate, desire’ because in them lie ‘entirely new demands on the social order’. Fighting to change the current economic system, Seigworth and Grossberg contend, is simply to use ‘its own already defined assumptions’, a denial of *virtual* realities – ‘the multiplicities and contradictions’ – beyond or within capitalism. Once you recognize that culture (love, poetry, rock music, desire), and not economics, is the real problem, then your theory is fit for the unemployed and the CEO alike.

Guattari’s ‘aesthetic approach to politics’ is further literalized in Berlant’s study of ‘Cruel Optimism’. Berlant’s analysis focuses on the moment in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in which Marx describes the ‘abolition of private property’ as signaling the ‘*emancipation* of all human senses’. No longer seeing objects as fetishes and nature as a matter of use, the senses, Marx says, become ‘theoreticians’. Berlant draws on this passage in Marx to understand the

poet John Ashbery’s untitled send-up of the American Dream. According to Berlant, ‘our senses are not yet theoreticians because they are bound up by the rule, the map, the inherited fantasy, and the hum of worker bees who fertilize materially the life we are moving through.’ The problem, for Berlant, is the suburban fantasy ‘of the endless weekend’, the ‘consumer’s happy circulation in familiarity’, and the ‘privilege of being bored with life’. (Gregg’s essay similarly takes up the regressive ‘politics of the cubicle’.) As a reading of Ashbery this might be right, but as an account of Marx it isn’t. For Marx, of course, the problem is the privilege of private property, not the ‘privilege of being bored’. One could safely eradicate boredom, without it bearing on the problem of capital. The anxious worker, after all, lacks (and perhaps looks forward to) the privilege of being bored. And affects, despite their ‘sensorium-shaking’ transformation of the ‘bourgeois senses’, begin to look a lot like the fetishized private property Marx scrutinized. Affects are, Berlant insists, ‘radically private, and pretty uncoded’, and, like the fetishized commodity, they make their dazzling appearance with the labour behind them obscured. These private experiences are in fact beyond analysis – an affect, after all, ‘is just a fact’.

Todd Cronan

## Of course... however

Michael Bailey and Des Freedman, eds, *The Assault on Universities: A Manifesto for Resistance*, Pluto Press, London, 2011. 200 pp., £14.99 pb., 978 0 74533 191 1.

The conceptual poles that orient the collection of essays edited by Des Freedman and Michael Bailey in *The Assault on Universities* are, on the one hand, an insistence on higher education as a public good, with public benefits and to be supported as a public service, and, on the other, a governmental policy – partially initiated prior to the current coalition government, but now pursued with an unprecedented speed, aggression and intensity – set on the thoroughgoing privatization of that sector. These poles are schematized in Freedman’s introduction as the ‘reformers’ towards privatization versus a campaign of ‘resistance’ that seeks to defend what is most progressive about the existing public education system.

That many of the essays in this book are marked by the ferocity of the transformations we are experiencing