Affect

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Affect refers to sensations and physiological shifts in intensity that may or may not formalise into conceptually distinct and collectively recognized feelings. Compared to emotions, which anthropologists see as feelings embedded in sociolinguistic concepts like love, anger, jealousy, han *(Korean for sadness-grief),* song *(Ifaluk for justified anger), or* hygge *(Danish and Norwegian for cosiness), affects are conceived as more fluid. Although registered through biological and bodily sensation, affects are also culturally conditioned and can, in turn, strongly influence sociocultural dynamics. Anthropologists have long explored the varieties of emotional experience across cultures, from the analysis of different patterns of emotional behaviour in the early twentieth century to the linguistic comparison of different emotional expressions through the 1970s and 80s. Since around the 1990s, however, anthropologists began to shift their focus to the diverse ways that emotions also involve less linguistically determined but nevertheless socially conditioned bodily experiences they called ‘affect’. This entry documents early psychological and philosophical genealogies of affect; the relation of affect to anthropological studies of emotion; critiques of and counterpoints to the affect concept; and enduring themes in ethnographic studies of affect.*

Introduction

An uneasy tingling of your skin when you pass through an unknown patch of forest; a sigh of comforting relief when you taste a familiar home-cooked dish after months away; the joyous energy of singing along with friends—word-for-word—the lyrics of a hit song; the high-intensity movements of a shamanic ritual; the low-intensity stillness of meditation; a dampness in the spleen; a longing in the heart; an ache. Many experiences are sensed but are not easily identified with a familiar emotion word like ‘fear’, ‘nostalgia’, ‘joy’, ‘transcendence’, ‘equanimity’, ‘worry’, ‘heartache’, or even ‘pain’. Moreover, feelings can often be surprising, arising at unexpected moments and carrying with them little indication of their origin or cause.

Although anthropologists have long been interested in these types of felt experiences, they have traditionally focused more explicitly on the public expression and symbolic display of feeling, which they called ‘emotion’. Since the 1990s, however, anthropologists in partnership with many others in allied social science and humanities disciplines began to explicitly emphasise the value of describing feelings that were sensed within and between bodies but did not always take linguistic or conceptual form. They called these ‘affect’.

Affect refers to a variety of bodily experiences, sensations, or simply perceived shifts in atmospheric intensities that, although conditioned through sociocultural environments, may not take form through

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culture-specific conventions and meanings. Despite their conceptual ambiguity, affects can feel sensorially distinct. They can feel strong, sharp, or subdued. Alternatively, they can also not feel like much at all, seemingly falling outside a person's conscious perceptions. As an analytical concept, affect offers new ways to investigate what anthropologists have in the past variously referred to as 'collective effervescence', 'sentiment', 'emotion', 'feelings', 'sensations', and 'the senses'. The broad semantic spectrum of these terms suggests not only that emotional experiences are diverse but so too are the conditions that shape them. The adoption of affect as a key conceptual tool was driven in part by a desire to address dimensions of experiences that eluded clearly circumscribed cultural frameworks and linguistic structures of meaning.

Affect theory brings together perspectives from psychology, philosophy, and several other fields such as gender studies, ethnic studies, and literature to explore the bodily and relational aspects of feeling. The following sections outline the development of the affect concept in anthropological theory. The first section traces influential genealogical roots for affect found within psychology and philosophy. The second highlights the relation between affect and earlier anthropological work on emotion. Section three evaluates critiques of and counterpoints to affect, given that the term is highly contested and debated within the emerging field of affect theory. The fourth section features distinctive features of the affect concept, and the conclusion considers enduring themes of affect studies, including implications for ethnographic method and disciplinary critique.

Psychological and philosophical forerunners to affect

Literature on affect in anthropology can be theoretical, abstract, and contested (see introductions to affect such as De Antoni 2019; Liljeström 2016; Rutherford 2016; White 2017). Therefore, it is helpful to outline key theoretical discussions in the past, which have traditionally emphasised Western traditions and that inform contemporary anthropological debates on affect. Two genealogies of this concept are particularly prominent, one psychological and the other philosophical. Each contributes distinct but complementary perspectives to shed light on how affect operates as an embodied and relational phenomenon. A common theme of this literature is a concern with how to relate somatic, or bodily, aspects of emotional processes (the 'affective') with its symbolic, conceptual, and representational components (the 'emotional').

Early psychological debates on affect adopted the worldview of Western science, which understood emotional energies as grounded in bodies and inherited through processes of evolution. As part of a natural continuum that humans share with non-human animals, according to Charles Darwin, emotional capacities could be identified through expressional behaviours, such as tendencies to bear one's teeth when angry (Darwin [1872] 2018). This evolutionary view remained apparent in an early debate on the definition of emotion, which centred around a famous anecdote that questioned, for instance, whether fear is a condition that triggers one to run upon encountering a bear in the woods or is rather the post-hoc ascription of fear to an aroused body. Psychologist William James' (1884) idea is that the 'subjective

experience [of sensations like] fear or disgust is the result of a process that unfolds *after* the alerting change in core affect' (Beatty 2019, 202). In other words, although the common view sees emotion as a sensation that comes after one is 'afraid' (one sees a bear, becomes afraid, and runs away), James argued the reverse: that one is 'afraid' because of the physical experience of bodily sensations (one sees a bear, runs away, and finds oneself afraid).

These early debates on emotion became even more contested with the arrival of Freudian theory and the globalisation of discourses on instincts, Id, and the unconscious (W. Anderson, Jenson, and Keller 2011). With the spread of Freud's idea that one's psyche could be split between conscious and subconscious elements, scholars began to more commonly distinguish between feelings as containing both emotionally conscious and affectively un- or non-conscious components. Psychologist Silvan Tomkins (1962a; 1962b) expanded on these ideas, proposing a taxonomy of core affective instincts, such as interest-excitement, enjoyment-joy, or anger-rage. His work posited that while these states are universally shared, their expressions vary across cultural contexts. Early innovative essays in critical theory that began using the word 'affect' (Sedgwick and Frank 1995a; 1995b) revisited Tomkins' theories, paving the way for a culturally oriented affect theory. For affect theorists today, this psychological lineage has inspired a set of questions focused on whether affect is universal or culturally distinct, to what degree it is grounded in bodies, minds, or both, and whether affect emerges before, simultaneously with, or after a conscious recognition of an experience of emotion.

Western philosophers also demonstrated an early interest in the relation between the somatic and ideological components of emotion. The philosopher Baruch Spinoza ([1677] 1994) defined affect (or what he called *affectus*) as the capacity to 'affect and be affected', a common phrase that many anthropologists would later cite. Spinoza described affect as 'affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, *the ideas of these affections*' ([1677] 1994, 70, emphasis added). Spinoza's view was that affect (bodily capacities) and emotion ('the ideas of these affections') are two dimensions of an inseparable single process, an argument which reflects his opposition to the mind-body dualism of his time.

Spinoza continues to inspire contemporary affect theorists who highlight the enduring open-ended, processual, and mutable qualities of the affective body as it exists in relation to different social and material environments. His ideas were rekindled in the widely read materialist philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, and popularised most prominently by the philosopher Brian Massumi (1995; 2002). From Massumi's point of view, affect indicates pre-conscious modulations of 'intensity' moving through and between bodies (Massumi 1995; 2002). Emotion, on the other hand, is 'qualified intensity', its conceptual 'capture' in meaning, or the 'socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal' (Massumi 1995, 88). From this perspective, affect could be understood as a kind of physiological flux of sensation that is registered in bodies and travels between them; emotion, on

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the other hand, is the conceptualisation of that sensation in a culturally shared and often linguistically coded meaning.

Within contemporary debates on affect, the philosophical idea that 'arrangements' (Slaby, Mühlhoff, and Wüschner 2017) of humans and non-human objects shape and are shaped by affect prior to affect's capture in meaning became a popular and highly contested idea. Many contemporary scholars in the humanities and social sciences cite this particular philosophical genealogy of affect as influential, even if they are also critical of it (Ahmed 2004b; Berlant 2011; Berlant and Stewart 2019; Seigworth and Gregg 2010; Seigworth and Pedwell 2023). For example, some scholars argue that the terms 'emotion' and 'affect' identify qualitatively distinct experiences that follow 'different logics' and 'pertain to different orders' (Massumi 2002, 27). Other scholars see emotion and affect as existing along a continuum (Ngai 2005). Still others have proposed that the perception of an 'affect-emotion gap' is itself the product of particular discursive knowledge regimes, and varies based on different cultural, political, and socioeconomic applications of affect and emotion as technical terms (White 2017; 2022).

As a result of these debates, affect became a helpful conceptual lens through which ethnographers could focus attention on nuanced felt experiences that could exceed or precede cognition and language. It also provided a more fine-grained way to approach the contagious involvement and coordination of bodies that can be witnessed during rituals, political rallies, festivals, or in stadiums. In this regard, affect offered anthropologists more diverse and detailed perspectives on classic sociological theories of sentiment, such as Émile Durkheim's notion of 'collective effervescence' (Durkheim [1912] 2008), which conveys a homogenisation of affects into one single group experience.

For example, ethnographic research on contemporary militarism in Pakistan demonstrates how the state can mobilise affect to sustain its authority over other political groups in society (Rashid 2020). Through a study of mourning rituals orchestrated by military personnel, anthropologists have shown how the military transforms grief into a resource for national solidarity. Ritual activities like public commemorations of martyred soldiers and state-sponsored funerals create 'affective subjects' who embody both personal loss and collective loyalty. Such examples show how affect operates not only as a homogenous collective force that can emerge through large-scale rituals but also as a constellation of complex feelings that can be specifically cultivated by certain social groups and selectively fostered or resisted by others.

Anthropologies of emotion

Anthropological work on affect builds closely on anthropological studies of emotions. These studies looked primarily to non-Western case studies of emotional experiences to examine how emotions varied from one context to another, providing evidence that challenged universal perspectives assumed by early research. Prominent works on this theme from the early twentieth century approached emotion as a marker of

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cultural difference. These works were influenced by psychological approaches and were later categorised under the label ‘culture and personality studies’. Representative studies depicted cultures as comparable through their dominant ‘patterns’ of dispositions, attitudes, beliefs, and personalities that make up a specific cultural entity (Benedict [1934] 2005). One influential study of the Japanese by Ruth Benedict, for example, juxtaposed individualistic ‘Americans’ motivated by emotional matrices of guilt and free expression with a more group-oriented ‘Japanese’, who were portrayed as motivated by shame, interdependence, and an obligation to different in-groups (Benedict [1946] 1974). In the case of interpersonal transgression, for example, ‘instead of accusing a man of being unjust, as an American would’, says Benedict, Japanese ‘specify the circle of behavior he has not lived up to’, and pointing to the particular ‘province’ or ‘code’ that was violated (195). Therefore, in cases of socially perceived bad behaviour, an American ‘may suffer from guilt’, whereas for ‘the Japanese’ ‘a failure to follow their explicit signposts of good behavior…is a shame’ (223–4).

In the 1970s and 80s, anthropologists reformulated these ideas of cultural difference imagined through constructs of emotion-based patterns and personality types, critiquing them as too rigid, culture-bound, and resistant to change. Instead, they focused on analysing emotional differences that could be observed through linguistic discourses and ‘emotional lexicons’ (Frevert et al. 2014). These anthropologists of emotion focused on cultural differences primarily by scrutinising emotion words in the languages of those they studied that did not neatly translate into English. This method offered insights into a broad human spectrum of emotional experiences existing both across and within different cultural groups.

For example, in a prominent 1980s study of the Ifaluk in Micronesia, based on fieldwork carried out in the late 1970s, anthropologists highlighted local words such as *fago* (loneliness/sadness) and *song* (justified anger) to build a critique of the ‘unnatural’ gendered division between reason and emotion in Western cultures (Lutz 1982; 1988). Other anthropologists working among the Pintupi of Australia examined emotions such as *rarru* (anger), which arose from threats to ‘shared identity or kinship’ (*walytja*) with others. These studies suggested that emotions emerge as semiotic—or meaning-making—practices rooted ‘in social life and its relationship to other signs’ (Myers 1988, 607). Among the Ilongot in the northern Philippines, strong feelings like *liget* resembled sentiments of anger and grief but did not have exact equivalents in Anglophone cultures, and appeared highly nuanced, complex, and variable (M. Rosaldo 1980, 1983, 143; R. Rosaldo 1989, 3; Spiegel 2017). These works demonstrated that emotions go beyond discrete bio-psychological categories and are embedded in social processes of language, meaning-making, and ethics (Lutz 1982; 1988; 2017).

Despite their innovative and nuanced approaches to emotion, some anthropologists perceived limits in what they saw as an increasingly outdated and culture-bound model of comparison. These critiques came in the wake of globalising processes that rendered the cultural boundaries of emotional words less distinct. Additionally, a theoretical turn in the 1980s emphasised a reflexive analysis of the Western literary

conventions of anthropological writing, and challenged an 'us-them' model of culture (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986). In light of their focus on culturally specific language and public symbols, previous studies of emotion were also criticised for overlooking aspects of bodily intensity that could exceed and confound language, potentially impacting bodies beyond conscious reflection.

These critiques grew throughout the 2000s, extending to disciplines beyond anthropology, and resulted in a theoretical shift away from the discursive dynamics of emotion toward sensations that did not neatly map onto emotional lexicons. Some scholars referred to this shift as the 'affective turn' (Clough 2007). Authors associated with this 'turn' sought to address more explicitly what language-centred analyses in the 1980s and 90s had partly and implicitly left out. Thus, affect theory provided alternatives to certain critiques made of the anthropology of emotion. Yet, it also became the target of new critiques, which argued that affect approaches overlook aspects of sociality in favour of describing bodily sensations, physiology, and abstract energetic processes of cultural dynamics.

Critiques of affect and counterpoints

With the rise of theoretical literature on affect, the term became increasingly targeted for critique and reformulation. For example, some critics took issue with an idea of affect as a field of 'direct feeling' that is supposedly distinct from the 'conscious recognition' of emotion (Ahmed 2004b, 39). They worried this approach risked universalising affect as a natural phenomenon disconnected from the socio-political forces that shape it. Related critiques argued that such a distinction even resembles a form of biological essentialism and reductionism, in which affect is treated as autonomous from ideology (e.g., Leys 2011, 2017).

Despite these on-going critiques of affect theory, some early studies of emotional and affective processes had specifically sought to show how social dynamics could shape physiological processes that were usually identified as purely biological or psychological phenomena. For instance, while a sensation such as pain may be commonly seen as an objective measure of a body's biological response to a harmful stimulus, it can also be understood as operating through implicit value judgements of gender, ethnicity, and racial difference that 'code' pain in ways that register differently in the surfaces of skin. A study of an Australian government report on testimony of the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander children from their families in Australia, for example, shows how historical narratives and contemporary legal practices can result in different effects upon the surfaces of bodies. While the report includes Aboriginal testimonies that read painfully to Indigenous communities, its suggestion that white Australians should acknowledge 'national shame' but not necessarily feel 'personal guilt' could be read as producing different affective results for readers with different skin colours: 'Indigenous Australians tell their personal stories, but white readers are allowed to disappear from this history, having no part in what was done' (Ahmed 2004a, 34–5). From this point of view, pain emerges as an immediate sensation, shaped through histories that read and

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feel differently for different people. Such studies show that 'sensations are mediated, however immediately they seem to impress upon us' (Ahmed 2004a, 30).

Although some studies like the above had directly addressed how bodily sensations could surface through social categories, other scholars still worried that broader trends in affect theory ignored how gender (Boler and Zembylas 2016; Thien 2005), ethnicity (Ramos-Zayas 2011), and racialisation (Berg and Ramos-Zayas 2015) shape and socialise affect. In adopting this perspective, affect theorists were entering territory covered by scholars of feminism, ethnic studies, and critical race theory. Some called for 'critical examinations of "whiteness"' (Berg and Ramos-Zayas 2015, 654) and sought to point out explicit examples from historical studies and queer theory that analyse the affective dimensions of racial dynamics. For example, historical studies of Latin American and Caribbean migrants in the United States have shown how certain depressive states were described by predominantly white mental health professionals through culture-bound taxonomies, such as *familismo, fatalismo,* or the 'Puerto Rican syndrome' (Berg and Ramos-Zayas 2015, 660; see also Muñoz 2006). Certain painful feelings tied to migration experiences, surfacing as uncontrollable screaming, trembling, or aggression in young women, were labelled as 'abnormal' and characterised through ethnic categorisations (Berg and Ramos-Zayas 2015, 660). Conversely, as other historical studies have shown, the perception of schizophrenia changed significantly in the 1960s from being seen as a 'harmless' condition primarily affecting white people to being viewed as a dangerous disorder characterised by anger and linked with the civil rights and Black Power movements (Berg and Ramos-Zayas 2015, 660; see also Metzl 2009). These studies show how institutional practices and ways of talking about race can condition negative affective states through racial frames.

Other critics argued that many affect studies ignored the role of history and place in conditioning affective responses, and offered compelling ethnographic examples as counterpoints. For instance, in a study on the 'affective geographies' of post-war Cyprus, after a 1974 partition of the island's residents into a distinct northern Turkish-Cypriot and southern Greek-Cypriot territory, residents told stories of the melancholic feelings they encountered within ruined landscapes. Turkish Cypriots living in the abandoned homes of Greek Cypriots in the north faced an 'atmosphere' that 'discharged a feeling of the uncanny, a strange feeling' that was derived for some 'out of a sense of impropriety, haunting, or an act of violation' (Navaro-Yashin 2009, 11). Such studies raise the question of whether the feelings encountered in these landscapes are subjective, coming from the individual's perception of a historically storied space, or the material environment itself, filled with abandoned objects and unkempt fields. Ethnographic evidence suggests that 'neither the ruin…nor the people who live around it are affective on their own […] but both produce and transmit affect relationally' (Navaro-Yashin 2009, 14). Detailed ethnographic studies of these socio-historical qualities of environments and space can help anthropologists unpack the multilayered impacts that some geographers have called 'affective atmospheres' (Anderson 2009).

Still other critics worried that philosophical oriented theorists of affect too heavily emphasise a 'gap'

between the 'signifying order' and 'affective order'; that is, between that which can be articulated and that which escapes linguistic expression (Martin 2013, S155; Ahmed 2004b; Berg and Ramos-Zayas 2015; Navaro 2017; Navaro-Yashin 2009). They wondered whether such a distinction was needed between emotion and affect at all. To this question, some of today's affect theorists respond that neither early formative philosophical works on affect nor much of the affect literature that followed it subscribed to as hard of a break between affect and emotion as was characterised in some critiques of affect. As noted by Massumi in his popular work on affect, 'The approach suggested here does not accept any categorical separation between the social and the presocial, between culture and some kind of "raw" nature or experience… The field of emergence is not presocial. It is open-endedly social' (Massumi 2002, 9). Choosing to avoid this debate altogether, some scholars have advocated using the terms 'affect' and 'emotion' interchangeably (see Lutz 2017) or argued for 'modal' approaches that posit affect and emotion on a continuum, 'whereby affects acquire the semantic density and narrative complexity of emotions, and emotions conversely denature into affects' (Ngai 2005, 27).

Anthropologists of 'embodiment' have also contributed to discussions of how emotional and affective practices can exist along a continuum. These scholars argue that a focus on embodiment helps situate affect not as distinct from meaning-making processes, suggestive of body-mind dichotomies, but as something through which 'dualities such as subject and object or meaning and the material world (evoking mind/body) can be collapsed' (McDonald 2018, 187; also see Csordas 1990; 1993). For example, studies of exorcism rituals in Italy show how feelings and affects situated in embodied practices like prayer and touch constitute the basis for the experiential emergence of spiritual entities such as the devil. These felt experiences of the possessed person and the participants in exorcisms, in turn, contribute to the reality and the 'capturing' of particular entities into historicised, cultural structures of meaning—namely one demon or angel rather than another (De Antoni 2022). This ethnographically grounded approach to bodily feelings showcases what a focus on affect can offer anthropology.

Finally, some critics raised a methodological concern about philosophical descriptions of affect as an 'escape' from 'perception' (Massumi 2002, 36) or, in other words, as something that was difficult to articulate or 'capture' in language (see also Stodulka et al., 2019). For some ethnographers accustomed to describing their interlocutors through narratives, thinking of affect as that which always escapes its articulation has led to practical and methodological frustrations. It has also invited evocative experimental forms of writing about affect, such as works on everyday American life that attempt to capture the somatic contours of daily routines and 'ordinary affects' in poetic language that does not correspond to common analytical concepts (Stewart 2007, 1; also see Berlant and Stewart 2019). Many anthropological works on affect can be both highly theoretical and/or poetic in their approaches, and thus offer powerful insights through virtuosity in prose. At the same time, they can appear to some as overly abstracted from ethnographic contexts (Beatty 2019, 210–6). Thus, writing against the aforementioned critiques, many

recent ethnographies analyse affect as situated in historical and cultural contexts (Ahmed 2004b; Berg and Ramos-Zayas 2015; Boler and Zembylas 2016; Muehlebach 2011; Muñoz 2006; Navaro-Yashin 2009; 2012; Newell 2018; Ngai 2005). Such works emphasise the simultaneously material, historical, social, somatic, and semiotic aspects of affect, and how these components relationally feed back into one another through dynamic 'affective-discursive loops' (Wetherell 2012, 7).

Indeed, some recent studies of affect have addressed the challenging question of how socio-material arrangements take on a force that is felt before it is conceived by revisiting classic arguments in social theory, such as in the popular discussion around *mana* (Mazzarella 2017a). *Mana* is a concept found throughout Polynesia that refers to a transhuman 'force or efficacy' that was ascribed to certain people or places that expressed palpable power and 'vital energetics' (Mazzarella 2017a, 1). Sociologist Émile Durkheim described *mana* as 'at once a physical force and a moral power' (Mazzarella 2017a, 1), resembling contemporary anthropologists' interest in the relation between the emotional-conceptual and affective-somatic aspects of social processes. Such innovate reinterpretations of social theory show that what anthropologists today call 'affect' can be used to shed light on classic anthropological debates, resulting in a series of productive connections between anthropological studies of affect, emotions, *mana*, collective effervescence, and the 'senses' (Howes 2005; Pink 2009).

Advancing distinctive contributions of affect

Despite the many critiques of affect, including constructive suggestions to consider the overlapping territory between affect and emotion, there remain strong arguments for maintaining the distinctiveness of the term. For example, given that human acts of sensing or 'feeling with the world' (De Antoni and Dumouchel 2017) incorporate complex, fluid dimensions of both somatic and semiotic phenomenon, the word 'affect' can help disambiguate multiple processes. It can help anthropologists discern somatic processes that seem to function in part outside or below discourse more discretely, catalogue them more comprehensively, and add to ethnographic descriptions' clarity, granularity, and sensitivity. This can sometimes require the modulation of the ethnographer's own senses, which broadens previous conceptions of what makes for good ethnographic training.

For example, a case study of the French perfume industry demonstrates how affective capacities can develop through pedagogies of training, sensory exercises, and objects like an odour kit (Teil 1998). An odour kit is 'made of a series of sharply distinct pure fragrances arranged in such a way that one can go from sharpest to the smallest contrasts. To register those contrasts one needs to be trained' (Latour 2004, 207). In so doing, a perfumer, or an ethnographer studying perfume, must learn to 'have a nose' that allows one to inhabit a (richly differentiated odoriferous) world' (207). New bodily capacities develop alongside encounters with objects that also operate affectively on the body. The result is that one develops a new, more discrete sensory capacity that at the same time unveils a more sensory-rich world particular to the

modern French perfume industry.

Affect as a conceptual tool can also point to the experience of feelings that, while conditioned by cultural contexts, often misalign with or even challenge established cultural values. It can also help anthropologists articulate what happens in spaces of intimacy, whether of private homes or of selves, that do not fit—or fit only in queer relation—with established social values. In the Sindh Province of Pakistan, *fakirs* (meaning 'beggars' in Urdu and, in some cases, 'transgenders' in Sindhi) refer to persons who voluntarily take up poverty as a practice of ascetic devotion to Islamic saints, often motivated by 'prophetic dreams and personal callings' (Kasmani 2022, 8). Through devotional practices and mystical encounters with saints, some *fakirs* describe experiences of closeness and intimacy with saints that serve both as compelling testimonies of desirable affect for other ascetics and morally troubling stories for religious and political authorities. Thus, affects of 'private feelings' and 'intimate relations with saints carry ramifications for broader regimes and critiques of power' (10).

Another helpful approach to affect is a reflexive one, which subjects conceptualisations of affect, such as 'the affect-emotion gap' described above, to ethnographic observation. When doing so, it becomes clear how anthropologists' practices of theorising affect can resemble those of their interlocutors. In national branding campaigns in Japan, for example, anthropologists noted how something like an 'affect-emotion gap' was also conceptualised by bureaucrats and national cultural policy makers. These officials observed an affective excitement among global consumers of pop-culture commodities produced in Japan and sought to convert it into an emotionally charged affinity for Japan itself. For example, through government-funded events promoting cultures of *manga*, to which many readers are attracted for its minor and counter-cultural themes, officials attempted to mainstream *manga* as a national cultural property of Japan. In this way, an increasingly global cultural commodity could be transformed into a potential national resource of soft power (Galbraith 2019; Leheny 2018; White 2022).

A similar process of gapping or splitting emotional processes can be observed within the global technological world of modelling affection, preference, and taste. For example, computer scientists at academic labs and corporate offices in the US who build taste recommendation algorithms for social media feeds presume that an affective appeal for a certain music style can be coded into numbers (Seaver 2022). Such a perspective splits a feeling of affection into the affective dimensions of personal experience and the emotional dimensions of 'preference' that can be computed. Similarly, engineers and computer scientists operating in the field of 'affective computing' (Picard 1997) at prominent labs at MIT and Cambridge rely on models that understand 'affect' as physiological changes in the body and 'emotion' as something codable in a machine system and translatable to humans interpreting those systems. Adapting work on affective computing to East Asian contexts, some robot engineers in Japan have experimented with building 'affective engines' into emotionally intelligent technologies, which could theoretically discern the affective states of people by reading the signal of an emotion, such as 'happiness', through the facial-expression

recognition of a smile (see Fujita and Kitano 1998; White and Katsuno 2021; 2023). These examples illustrate how many specialists in the hard sciences are currently operationalising their own theories of affect to much greater impact than anthropologists. In fieldwork within rapidly changing technological worlds, the term 'affect' can therefore help anthropologists track significant transformations in the meanings, applications, and experiences of both human and more-than-human emotion.

Conclusions

As the above theoretical debates and ethnographic examples illustrate, studies of affect are diverse and contested. Nevertheless, enduring themes remain. Three are prominent. The first is the proposition that affect can point to feelings experienced beyond language or cognition—although not necessarily unaffected by them. Affect is indeed something more than *just* meaning. Rather, affect holds promise to add dimensionality to meaning, showing that meaning incorporates dynamic aspects of exchange between bodily experience and signification (Slaby and Röttger-Rössler 2018; Newell 2018; and Mazzarella 2009; 2017b). Affect points to somatic worlds in a way that is shared among others and consequentially entangled with semiotic concepts and conditioning. Bringing affect and semiotics together in this way can offer 'improved understanding of both as the intertwined core of sociality itself' (Newell 2018, 2).

A second enduring theme of affect is relationality. Although human bodies can be understood as individual sense-making and sense-registering entities, they are far from being *merely* an individuated product of established discourse. Rather, bodies can function as nodes that register, exchange, mediate, reciprocate, co-participate, and change in relation with other bodies or simply bodily parts—human or otherwise, living or inanimate (Navaro-Yashin 2009; Bennett 2010). This relationality of affect points directly to affect's political dimensions and power dynamics, which incorporate aspects of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and several other theoretical concepts commonly used in socio-cultural anthropology (Berg and Ramos-Zayas 2015; Boler and Zembylas 2016).

Third, although affects may be distinguished by their uneasy alignment with conventional cultural categories, this by no means implies that affects are socially *un*conditioned. This point suggests that studies of affect hold potential to not only enrich previous anthropological studies of emotion but also to expand anthropologists' understanding of the 'culture' concept on which the discipline still heavily depends. Through its ability to point anthropologists to the dynamic relation between public symbols and private feeling, the affect lens can unearth experiential dimensions of culture that have not been fully explored until recently.

Finally, beyond these enduring themes, affect may hold the greatest potential not in its theory-heavy analytics, which can draw disproportionately from the Western and philosophical traditions outlined above, but rather in its ethnographic applications in fieldwork. A growing collection of richly detailed

ethnographies of religious practices, digital media, and human-nature interactions—many of non-Western contexts—show that affective practices exist in diverse and dynamic forms that don't accommodate easily to established analytical theorising. For example, the deep cultivation of balanced states of feeling through Buddhist meditation in Thailand (Cook 2010); the pursuit of 'queer companionship' between Islamic saints and ascetics (Kasmani 2022); the mediation of the paranormal in Chile (Espírito Santo 2023); or the making of intimate and sometimes indifferent relationships with non-human others such as palms (Chao 2022), orangutans (Chua 2018; Parreñas 2012, 2018), mushrooms (Tsing 2021), and microbes (Benezra 2023): these innovative studies of affective themes diversify anthropology's traditional understandings of culture; expand who speaks for and feels ethnographic knowledge; and offer reflexive resources for productively undoing and remaking the affective modes through which anthropological work is undertaken.

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