LIDIJA ŠUMAH

From Turn to Affect to Return to Freud

Turn! Turn! Turn!

Recent history of philosophy is marked by a series of so-called theoretical turns.[1] As such, contemporary philosophical thought can be understood as a history of turns or intellectual transitions that have reshaped not only philosophy but also its relationship with other disciplines. These shifts

[1] It has been widely recognized and extensively documented that since the second half of the 20th century, we witness a significant rise in paradigm shifts, which have evolved into a kind of theoretical trend. This long trajectory spans from the initial linguistic turn to more recent and ongoing ones focusing on bodies, objects, and new materialism while often rejecting (purely) linguistic analyses. To name only a few turns that have and still are reshaping the humanities and social sciences: epistemological, ontological, historical, pragmatic, phenomenological, postmodern, social, affective, spatial, bodily, informational, posthuman, etc. See, for example, Robert Wess' thesis from his *Philosophical Turn: Epistemological, Linguistic, and Metaphysical*, 24, which he built on McKeon's idea that philosophical turns change which components (things, thoughts, language, action…) are prioritized in philosophy's subject matter: "Seeing beginnings entails seeing clearly the subject matter of philosophy, which in turn entails seeing that the subject matter of philosophy changes in 'philosophical turns.'" Also see Greig Henderson, "Review: Philosophical Turns: Epistemological, Linguistic, and Metaphysical by Robert V. Wess." Our subtitle is taken from Pete Seeger's 1959 piece *Turn! Turn! Turn!* (*To Everything There Is a Season*).

not only function as heuristic frameworks, gradually developing a unique autonomy within the humanities, but they may also be emerging as a standalone discipline potentially indicating the emergence of turn studies as an autonomous field of inquiry. One could even argue that they are evolving into a distinct meta-discipline. This specific phenomenon suggests that theoretical turns are not merely isolated conceptual shifts but rather part of broader epistemic transformations. What was once a series of disciplinary realignments now appears to constitute a meta-discourse on how knowledge itself evolves – how intellectual inquiry is shaped by the periodic adoption of new frameworks. One such turn in the history of philosophy is the turn to affect, which will be the central subject matter of this article.

This general philosophical interest in and theoretical fascination with turns roughly begins with the linguistic turn in the 1960s. The notion itself was coined by Bergman (in his review of Peter Strawson's *Individuals*) but is generally attributed to Wittgenstein.[2] The term itself was then further popularized by Rorty in his anthology *The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method* first published in 1967.[3] The linguistic turn, which rose to prominence just after the Second World War, signaled the increasing centrality of language as a foundational structure through which all human knowledge is mediated. Initially, the turn drew heavily from the work of Wittgenstein, whose later philosophy, instead of focusing on the rejection of the search for essentialist meanings, rather put emphasis on the pragmatic nature of linguistic use. In a broader sense, this philosophical event implied the birth of analytic philosophy, in turn spurring the analytic-continental divide. Though not tied to any specific philosophy, this focus on language is nonetheless evident in almost every major modern

2 Gustav Bergmann, "Strawson's Ontology"; Gustav Bergman, "Stenius on the Tractatus: A Special Review"; and P. M. S. Hacker, "The Linguistic Turn in Analytic Philosophy," in: *The Oxford Handbook of The History of Analytic Philosophy*. According to Bergmann, there are two different groups of linguistic philosophers: ordinary language philosophers (such as Strawson) and ideal language philosophers (such as Bergmann himself).

3 Richard M. Rorty, "Ten Years After," in: *The Linguistic Turn*; and Richard M. Rorty, "Twenty-five Years After," in: *The Linguistic Turn*.

philosophical tradition. It is, for example, noticeable in Husserl's discourse ethics or discourse theory of morality and in Heidegger's and Habermas' approach to the concept of consciousness. It is further noticeable in critical theory, especially in Adorno and Horkheimer, in Russian formalism, and French structuralism and poststructuralism, along with the poststructuralist critiques espoused, among others, by Derrida and Foucault.

What these traditions have in common is that they all entertained the idea that philosophical inquiry should prioritize language as the main medium of the production of knowledge. All these traditions essentially understood language as the key to understanding human thought and experience. The advocates of the linguistic turn thus argued that transcending language is essentially an impossibility. They argued that thought itself is related to language in such a way that subject cannot think without already doing so within the structures of linguistic expression. Language shapes our understanding of our reality to such an extent that subjects have no other access to the world. As Derrida famously asserted: *"Il n'y a pas de hors-texte,"* or in Spivak's translation: *"There is nothing outside the text"*; language thus precedes and conditions that which it seeks to mediate.[4] Or to paraphrase Foucault, whose approach differed from Derrida's in that it prioritized Merleau-Ponty's idea of the limits of language over a focus on textuality: language does not have to refer to anything in the world; it can speak only its own meaning.[5]

Following the linguistic turn, numerous other intellectual reorientations emerged, each reshaping philosophical inquiry within the humanities and social sciences. First, there was the pictorial turn of the 1980s, which emphasized the importance of visual communication. In the same period, we then note the emergence of the bodily turn, which introduced the paradigm of embodiment. In this context, themes that highlighted the problem of the mind and body unity were revived, and concepts such as sentient body and embodied mind gained central theoretical focus. Neuroscience, for instance, drew heavily on the conceptual tools that this

4 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 77.

5 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*; Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*.

turn provided while feeding on the philosophy of Spinoza. Damasio, for example, following Spinoza and critically approaching Descartes, developed the theory of the feeling brain as a kind of critical response of neuroscience to Cartesian dualism.[6] More recently, in the mid-1990s, the affective and sensorial turns emerged as significant developments in contemporary thought. Both turns arose as direct consequences of the supposed insufficiency of previous turns, especially of the linguistic and bodily, and have greatly influenced the philosophy of the 21st century generally and contemporary philosophical theories of affectivity specifically.

Theorists of the sensory turn have shifted their attention to the senses as both an object of study and a conceptual tool of study itself. Or as David Howes, an anthropologist and one of the pioneers of the sensorial turn, put it, it is the idea of exploring the senses, but at the same time it is the use of the senses as means of exploration itself.[7] This latter methodological move redirects the structural rigor of anthropology to more lax methodological approaches based on the researcher's sensory experience of reality. Or as Howes put it: If I want to research drinking culture as an anthropologist, I have to go on a pub crawl.[8] This theoretical trend was at first most noticeable within visual anthropology, which uses techniques such as photography, film, and, more recently, blogs, podcasts, social platforms, etc. According to Howes, all previous turns are problematic, bearing specific weaknesses and shortcomings. For Howes, the problem of the linguistic turn was its verbalism, a desperate commitment to the word and hopeless search for meaning; the problem of the pictorial turn was its visuality, its desperate focus on the image; while the main problem of the bodily turn is the idea of the body as a unity, especially in light of the traditional typology of the five physical senses. According to some research, a human being has as many as thirty-three senses, while their exact number is always culturally conditioned.[9] Some cultures, for

6 Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error. Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*.

7 David Howes, "Afterword. The Sensory Revolution Comes of Age," 128–37.

8 David Howes, private communication.

9 David Howes, *Sensorium. Contextualizing the Senses and Cognition in History and Across Cultures*, 1ff.

instance, consider language as the sixth sense.[10] Additionally, the relationship between the body and the senses emerged as highly problematic because the senses bring a fractal dimension to the study of the body. For this reason the body itself effectively cannot be seen as a totality, but the focus must rather be shifted to the relationship between the senses themselves, which in turn again undermines the idea of bodily totality, exposing it to fractal dispersions.

Turn to Affect

The affective turn, on the other hand, stemming from a critique of the dominance of discourse analyses and semiotics, seeks to highlight passions, emotions, and feelings as fundamental dimensions of subjectivity and social life.[11] The Stoics, Plato, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, and Nietzsche have all offered different perspectives on the question of emotions and passions, from the Stoics' view of emotions as incorrect judgments to Nietzsche's affirmation of passion. In this sense, the turn to affect implies renewed scholarly interest in the concepts of corporeality and emotions as well as in the corresponding modern philosophies of Descartes, who associated passions with animal spirits, of Spinoza, for whom all human activity, including cognition, produces and is produced by affect, but also of Kant and Hume. More recent philosophers, such as Sartre, Irigaray, Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze, Guattari, and Foucault, have also influenced philosophies that explore topics of corporeality and emotions while recognizing the significance of the aesthetics dimension. In general, this theoretical reversal presupposes the idea that emotions are not simply mental states, but embodied experiences, which effectively means that emotions have intermingling bodily and mental resonances. At the same time, the

10 Alexander Z. Çelik, *Kinaesthetic Knowing: Aesthetics, Epistemology, Modern Design*, 159.

11 For a general overview, see Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*; and Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader*.

affective turn presupposes the idea that affects come before thoughts and language, that they are preverbal and precognitive. As a method of study, affect theory questions what human bodies can do, what they think and how they are driven by non-linguistic and non-rational forces – a question that echoes Spinoza's famous phrase from his *Ethics*: "We do not even know what a body can do."[12] Prior to Spinoza, emotions were often conceived as secondary aspects of the human mind, as supplementary elements, or something that needed to be restrained or curbed.[13] Think, for example, of Plato's idea of the tripartite soul and his allegory of the two winged horses from his *Republic* and *Phaedrus*. Affect theory further assumes that affects are not fixed emotional states, but rather a flowing quality that can be shaped by subject's thoughts and her actions, as well as by the subject's interactions with the world outside of her.

Affect theory's roots lie in psychology,[14] with Tomkins as its foundational figure. He argued that human beings have innate, biologically driven affects, such as joy and fear, which serve as primary motivators of behavior.[15] His work emphasized that emotions are not just reactions but central forces shaping our experience. Building on this, Ekman, on the other hand, studied facial expressions, showing that affects are universal across cultures.[16] Around the same time, Benjamin – one of the founders of relational psychoanalysis and one of the first to introduce feminism and gender studies into psychoanalytic thought – applied affect theory to interpersonal relationships, highlighting how emotions influence power dynamics, recognition, and social bonds.[17] In late 20th century, affect

12 Baruch de Spinoza, *Ethics*, II, prop. 13, scholium.

13 See Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before Its Triumph*.

14 For a more detailed account, see Adam Frank and Elizabeth A. Wilson, "Critical Response. Like-Minded."

15 Silvan Tomkins, *Affect Imagery Consciousness II*; Silvan Tomkins, *Affect Imagery Consciousness III*.

16 Paul Ekman, *Emotion in the Human Face*; Paul Ekman, "An Argument for Basic Emotions"; Paul Ekman and V. Friesen Wallace, *Unmasking the Face: A Guide to Recognizing Emotions from Facial Clues*.

17 Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*; Jessica Benjamin, *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and*

theory expanded into cultural and literary studies. Kosofsky Sedgwick demonstrated how emotions shape identity and social norms, particularly within queer theory.[18] Theorists like Brian Massumi and Erin Manning conceived affect in terms of preconscious bodily responses, showing that feelings often occur before human beings consciously process them. Scholars such as Seigworth and Gregg consolidated these ideas, applying affect theory to media, politics, and society, making it a key interdisciplinary framework.[19] According to Leys, Massumi (in his seminal essay "The Autonomy of Affect"), and Sedgwick and Frank (in their "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins") have shaped two main approaches of affect theory.[20] For Leys, the first vector begins with Kosofsky Sedgwick and Frank, who derive from Tomkins's theory of affect. According to Tomkins, the central characteristic of affects is affective resonance, which refers to the tendency of an individual to resonate and experience a certain affect in the same way as another person experiences it. This means that, for Tomkins, affect is contagious, that is, it can spread from one subject to another. Tomkins' theory of the contagion of affect assumes that if we are in a group of people and one person starts laughing uncontrollably, this encourages the laughter of others, even though most of them do not even know what exactly – if anything at all – is funny. In terms of Spinoza's *Ethics*, this corresponds to the concept of imitation of affects (*affectum imitatio*).[21] The second vector begins with Massumi and his "The Autonomy of Affect" (1985), *Parables for the Virtual* (2002), and *Thought in the*

Sexual Difference; Jessica Benjamin, *Beyond Doer and Done To: Recognition Theory, Intersubjective Psychoanalysis, and the Third*.

18 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*.

19 Gregg and Seigworth (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader*.

20 Namely: the Spinoza-Deleuze-Massumi vector and the psychological vector of Freud-Tomkins-Sedgwick. See Ruth Leys, "The Turn to Affect: A Critique"; Sedgwick and Frank, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins"; Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect"; and Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*.

21 "Consequently, if we imagine someone like us to be affected with some affect, this imagination will express an affection of our body like this affect. And so, from the fact that we imagine a thing like us to be affected with an affect, we are affected with a like affect. But if we hate a thing like us, then (by P23) we shall be affected

Act (2014), which he co-wrote with Manning. This theory is essentially non-representational. Massumi understands affect as autonomous, i.e., as an embodied preconscious response and as an intensity that arises as a consequence of stimuli. This means that according to Massumi, affect is not conscious and accessible to direct experience. Building on Deleuze and Guattari, Massumi distinguishes affect from emotion. In "The Autonomy of Affect," he thus claims that affect is a pre-personal intensity that corresponds to the physical capacity to affect and be affected. Unlike emotions, which can be qualified and narrativized, affects are essentially unqualified, autonomous, unconscious, and cannot be adequately conveyed through language, in turn directly registering on the body as unstructured intensities.

This theoretical premise shows a striking similarity with Jameson's notion of postmodernism as it applies to late capitalism and with Lyotard's idea of the post-subjective condition, where affects are also no longer tied to modernist narrative, intention, or cognition, but are instead virtual (in the Deleuzian sense) and cannot be located in discourse or psychopathology, while nonetheless shaping the very conditions of possibility for subjectivity and agency.

According to Jameson, the postmodern break with modernism concerns breaking with the monad-like concept of the subject as a kind of vessel from which internal affective states are expressed through projection outwards, while introducing the conception of subjectivity that is freed from the psychopathologies of the bourgeois ego. Jameson thinks this transition in relation to the status and fate of affectivity in the postmodern era, which is marked by the disappearance or "waning of affect" in the sense of intimate, essentially internal states, and its transposition into the exterior of free-floating and impersonal affective states:

> The end of the bourgeois ego, or monad, no doubt brings with it the end of the psychopathologies of that ego – what I have been calling the waning of

with an affect contrary to its affect, not like it, q.e.d." Spinoza, *Ethics*, III, prop. 27, scholium.

> affect. But it means the end of much more – the end, for example, of style, in the sense of the unique and the personal, the end of the distinctive individual brushstroke (as symbolized by the emergent primacy of mechanical reproduction). As for expression and feelings or emotions, the liberation, in contemporary society, from the older *anomie* of the centered subject may also mean not merely a liberation from anxiety but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling. This is not to say that the cultural products of the postmodern era are utterly devoid of feeling, but rather that such feelings – which it may be better and more accurate, following J.-F. Lyotard, to call "intensities" – are now free-floating and impersonal and tend to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria… We have often been told, however, that we now inhabit the synchronic rather than the diachronic, and I think it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than by categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism.[22]

In contrast to modernism, postmodernism involves a radical transformation of affectivity and subjectivity. In the postmodern era, the interior of the subject dissolves and affect is no longer understood as an intimate experience. Instead, emotions and feelings are displaced into the external world, which Jameson associates with a special kind of euphoria. These affects are not rooted in the subject's inner life, but are experienced as part of an external space, i.e., as diffuse affective states that surround and permeate the subject without any explicit connection to her personal psychopathology. The anxiety and alienation that are characteristic of modernity are now replaced by a neutrality and dispersion of affect. The postmodern subject is thus no longer preoccupied with the depth of her own affective life, but experiences affect as something outside herself, as a characteristic of her social, cultural, and even physical environment. In the postmodern era, the interior of the subject dissolves, and affect is no longer understood as an introspective experience rooted in personal depth. Rather,

22 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 15–16.

emotions and feelings are displaced into the external world – into what might be called the "affective atmosphere"[23] of late capitalist culture:

> Atmosphere refers to a feeling, mood, or *Stimmung* that fundamentally exceeds an individual body and instead pertains primarily to the overall situation in which bodies are entrenched. The concept of an atmosphere thus challenges a notion of feelings as the private mental states of a cognizant subject and instead construes feelings as collectively embodied, spatially extended, material, and culturally inflected. In this sense "atmosphere" can be considered a mereological concept: While "affect" refers to the ways in which (emerging) bodies relate to each other, "atmosphere" describes the ways in which a multiplicity of bodies is part of, and entrenched in, a situation that encompasses it.[24]

Jameson associates this shift with the concept of intensity: an overstimulation that, while emotionally charged, lacks the psychological interiority or narrative cohesion typical of modernist expressions of alienation or despair. These postmodern affects are thus no longer anchored in the psychic life of an individual but instead manifest as "ambient intensities," as sensations that circulate in the media and commodities, and other social and physical spaces that surround us.

For Jameson, affect is thus no longer the product of internal psychic processes, but something encountered and absorbed from the environment. It adheres to surfaces rather than depths, and it is encountered less as a felt emotion and more as a mood, atmosphere, or even a tone. The affective life of the subject thus becomes externalized, dispersed, and fundamentally impersonal. The anxiety and alienation characteristic of modernity – and presupposing a subject with depth and division – are, in this context, replaced by a curious neutrality, a flatness or dispersion of affect

---

23 The concept of atmosphere was first introduced in 1969 by phenomenologist Schmitz, who understood emotions as atmospheres (*Gefühle als Atmosphären*). See H. Schmitz, *Der Gefühlsraum. System der Philosophie 3;* Anderson, "Affective atmospheres"; and Böhme, *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*.

24 Friedlind Riedel, "Atmosphere," in: *Affective Societies*, 85.

that resists narrative integration. Postmodern subjects may feel stimulated, excited, or numbed, but they do not typically experience these conditions as symptoms of their internal conflict or existential crisis. Instead, affect becomes aestheticized, commodified, but above all experienced passively – as part of the sensory and symbolic overload of postmodern culture.

As a result, the postmodern subject is no longer preoccupied with the depth of her own affective life. Instead, she relates to affect not as something that a subject has or possess but rather as something that happens to the subject, that moves and composes the subject. This has led some theorists, such as Lyotard, to speak of a post-subjective condition, a mode of being in which the boundary between self and world, emotion and sensation, inside and outside, has become fundamentally unstable and perhaps even irrelevant.[25] In Lyotard's context, to feel something is not necessarily to express it or possess it; on the contrary, it is to be moved by impersonal forces whose sources and meanings remain diffuse and dispersed. Affect becomes ambient, but is never resolved or explicitly acknowledged.

These new affective conditions find their clearest expressions in Hollywood. Think, for example, of Sophia Coppola's *Lost in Translation* (2003), a movie often described as difficult to identify with in emotional or narrative terms because of its general moody tone. Coppola's main characters, Bob and Charlotte, are drifting thought the city of Tokyo as if they were in a phantasmatic dream city, as if they are subjected to a perpetual jetlag, surrounded by a million neon lights and caught in a never-ending existential boredom. In this sense one can also understand the lack of sexual relationship between the two main characters. Apart from their goodbye kiss and Bob having a brief relationship with another woman, we never witness any sexual intercourse or any other explicit expressions of sexual attraction. The specific sexual tension is present only in a form of touching feet and the relationship never culminates into a proper sexual one. Nonetheless, one could argue that the (sexual) desire is not completely absent but rather "floats freely" between the two characters: (sexual) desire is not lacking but

25 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*.

is somewhat suspended in such a way that it perpetually circulates between the protagonists. Or think of the hallucinatory landscape of affective overload, depicted in the TV-series *Euphoria* (Sam Levinson, 2019), where characters also seem to be suspended in neon and glitter like atmospheres and textures. Rue's depression is not presented as a narrative arc of her inner conflict but rather as a specific ambient texture. Affect surrounds Levinson's characters like a blend of vapor and haze, perfectly embodying the idea of free-floating affect detached from interiority. Or think of Munch's *The Scream*, one of the most famous emblems of modernism, where one has a feeling that anxiety is coming from within the subject, but like a silent force permeates and distorts the exterior. If *The Scream* were a work of postmodernism – which, of course, is debatable – the affect would come from the outside of the subject and permeate and distort the subject itself.

Return to Freud

What all these examples suggest is that the classical Freudian subject of the unconscious, structured by repression and its classical symptoms, has been replaced by a subject exposed to too-muchness, too-fastness, with no symbolic buffer, and that we are – perhaps once again – witnessing an emergence of a new conception of subjectivity. Namely, affects seem to be aestheticized and commodified, which is especially visible in Jameson's account, and symptoms no longer emerge as expressions of classical psychoanalytical conflict, but as flat, ambient states of overstimulation and too-muchness. The psychoanalytic clinic today – as many practitioners have noted – is indeed increasingly marked by melancholia without mourning, trauma without event, desire without object… Today's patients no longer show classical Freudian symptoms such as those associated with neuroses but rather display an affective blunting and other unusual forms of numbness, affective flattening, and depersonalization. These are diffused and porous conditions which are not so much expressions of repressed desire or emotions as they are signs of subject's overstimulation which today is essentially shaped by digital media. Already in

Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, intensities acquire new ontological centrality: they are defined as basic units of the unconscious, linked not to representation but to production and flow. Consider the following, ostensibly anti-Freudian claim: "Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the subject, that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject."[26] Their formulation reframes the concept of desire as intensive, machinic, and impersonal – a conceptualization that also echoes in their later *A Thousand Plateaus*, where intensity is aligned with becoming and deterritorialization. To recapitulate: for Jameson, Deleuze, Guattari, and Lyotard, intensities do not represent, they affect, and as such they are free-floating, hanging in mid-air, not in the sense of lacking causal efficacy but in their refusal to be bound by representations.

In her critique of affect theory,[27] particularly of non-representational theories which portray the concept of affect as pre-cognitive, non-intentional, independent of meaning and conscious thoughts, Leys points out that this idea misrepresents the relationship between mind and body creating a pseudo-Freudian dualism.[28] Here, and in her later book *The Ascent of Affect: Genealogy and Critique* (which is based on her 2011 article),[29] Leys frames the turn to affect as emerging from a rise of non-intentionalist theory. According to Leys, such pre-cognitive models reduce the Freudian unconscious processes to automatic, non-intentional processes and bodily intensities severed from intentionality and significance. Leys further argues that this misrepresentation has broader theoretical and political consequences: by separating affect from meaning, affect theory risks reducing the subject's behavior and her social existence to manipulations of intensity rather than reasoned, meaningful engagements. Overall, Leys frames Massumi's contribution to affect theory as a non-Freud-

26 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 26.

27 Ruth Leys, "The Turn to Affect: A Critique." For the critique of Leys' critique, see Donovan Schaefer, "Rationalist Nostalgia: A Critical Response to Ruth Leys' The Ascent of Affect"; Frank and Wilson, "Critical Response. Like-Minded"; and Charles Altieri, "Affect, Intentionality, and Cognition: A Response to Ruth Leys." For Leys' response, see Ruth Leys, "Facts and Moods: Reply to My Critics."

28 Besides Spinoza, Freud is the second central reference for affect theory.

29 Ruth Leys, *The Ascent of Affect: Genealogy and Critique*.

ian approach that oversimplifies the complexity of Freud's concept of the dynamic unconscious structured by repression. Affects, she argues, are necessarily intentional in the minimal philosophical sense that they are always about something. For Leys, fear, for example, cannot be understood as a raw bodily intensity independent of an interpretation of danger, since even rapid or automatic bodily responses presuppose prior learning, memory, and recognition. For Leys, the notion of a purely pre-meaningful affect mistakes a theoretical abstraction for an actual phenomenon. Leys essentially argues that affects cannot simply be representatives or represent the cultural or linguistic capture of an otherwise autonomous affective intensity. Rather, affective experience is already structured by meaning at the very moment it occurs. To claim that affect precedes interpretation is to ignore the ways in which bodily responses are conditioned by social and historical contexts. Importantly, here, Lays does not reject affect a such, for her critique does not imply a return to disembodied rationalism, but rather an attempt to reconceptualize it as both embodied and meaningful. From a philosophical perspective, Leys' main point of departure for criticizing Massumi is that his theory provides a problematic dualism between body and mind by creating and insisting on a false separation between affect and cognition, even as his theory claims to overcome representational thinking. Here, Leys even goes so far as to say that Massumi selectively interprets scientific findings to support a philosophical position that the evidence itself does not conclusively establish, misinterpreting science as such. And this is precisely why Leys sees Massumi's theory not just as part of the anti-hermeneutic turn in philosophy but also as part of a broader anti-psychoanalytic turn in affect theory.

In contrast to contemporary philosophy which we have depicted as a succession of conceptual turns, psychoanalysis resists such periodization.[30] If anything, psychoanalysis as such is a Turn, a turn compared by Freud himself to Copernicus' displacement of Earth from the center of the

30 This strictly Lacanian thesis is, however, debatable from the Kleinian perspective. Compare, for example, the shift from Freud's "patriarchal" model of psychoanalysis (based on the Oedipus complex traced to a mythical prehistoric murder of the father) to Klein's radical turn to the mother-infant relationship (Orestes complex).

cosmos. If psychoanalysis constitutes a turn at all, it is the radical decentering inaugurated by Freud's discovery of the unconscious, the insight Freud famously summarized with the claim that "the ego is not master in its own house":

> But these two discoveries – that the life of our sexual instincts cannot be wholly tamed, and that mental processes are in themselves unconscious and only reach the ego and come under its control through incomplete and untrustworthy perceptions – these two discoveries amount to a statement that the ego is not master in its own house.[31]

Lacan's treatment of Freud's discovery did not take place under the banner of turn to psychoanalysis or turn to Freud, but under a *re*turn to Freud. For Lacan, turning to psychoanalysis does not yet advance our understanding if in our turning we do not turn back to Freud. Lacan understood this motto as a methodological principle and as a critical intervention against postwar ego psychology. Ego psychology – early Lacan would argue – reverses Freud; it does not even represent a turn towards Freud, but a turn away from Freud. In 1960 Lacan thus constructed the neologism *extimité* (extimacy) to denote a structure of subjectivity in which the most intimate, internal core of the subject is already external(ized).[32] He linked this paradox to Freud's discovery of the unconscious processes. For Lacan, extimacy emerges as a structural consequence of psychoanalytic position that the unconscious is neither inside nor outside the subject but lodged at its core as something irreducibly Other. Insisting on the radical alterity of the unconscious, Lacan famously stated that "the unconscious is the discourse of the Other."[33] In this sense, the notion of extimacy is not some

---

With reference to Lacan's "Return to Freud" slogan, Klein turns away from (Freudian) psychoanalysis to turn to ego psychology.

31 Sigmund Freud, "A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis," in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 17, 5.

32 For an overview see J.-A. Miller, "Extimité."

33 The phrase "the unconscious is the discourse of the Other" is one of Lacan's most famous formulations, it appears in multiple texts, but is most directly associated with: Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and*

idiosyncratic Lacanian invention but a conceptual abbreviation of Lacan's return to Freud and – at the same time – the answer to the dilemmas raised by affect theory. The notion preserves Freud's decentering of the subject while translating it into a structural and linguistic framework, demonstrating how the most intimate dimensions of psychic life – such as desire, enjoyment, fantasy and so forth – are organized around an exterior kernel that the subject can never fully appropriate. Žižek, for example, translated this structure into the domain of ideology: for Žižek, ideology does not merely impose itself from the outside but operates as an external kernel that structures the subject's innermost beliefs, desires, and fantasies. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, ideology functions as an unconscious fantasy-frame through which subjects feel reality to be meaningful. The ideological attachment is thus extimate: what appears as my most personal conviction is already the effect of an external symbolic order.[34]

To conclude. If affect is deployed as a critique of language's representational capacity – as is the case in Leys – this presupposes that linguistic signs function as representational units. Drawing on Saussure, however, Lacan showed that the linguistic sign does not operate as a simple representation: in contrast to the notion of a natural sign such as a cat's footprint, which points unambiguously to its object, namely the cat, the relation structuring the linguistic sign is essentially nonreciprocal. Consequently, the representational status of the sign is not self-evident but is in fact contingent on the theoretical framework adopted, that is: it hinges essentially on the theory of language we adopt. From the perspective of the linguistic theory that informs Lacan's notion of the symbolic, the sign

in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955, 43–44. See also Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*; Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*; and Élisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*.

34 Already in his early *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) and *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (1992), Žižek explores how desire, jouissance, and ideology reveal the intimate as irreducibly external. Also see Zupančič's treatment of the notion of drive: against pre-symbolic immediacy, drive is the non-representable, repetitive excess produced by representation itself – the point where meaning fails but enjoyment persists. Alenka Zupančič, "Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself?!"

cannot be assumed to represent in any straightforward way, undermining affect-based critiques predicated on representational assumptions. This further shows that critiques of language that rely on the assumption of its representational function are theoretically unstable. Saussure's distinction between signifier and signified reveals that linguistic signs are not inherently reciprocal or referential in the way natural signs are. Therefore, any turn to affect that seeks to supersede or critique language on representational grounds must reckon with the non-representational nature of the linguistic sign. Taking Lacan's theory of language as a reference, it becomes clear that the sign's function cannot be reduced to representation, suggesting that the interplay between affect and language requires a framework attentive to the structural and symbolic dimensions of the sign rather than its supposed representational transparency. In this sense, Lacan's theory of language and his introduction of the notion of extimacy (describing a topological zone of unconscious formations that disrupts the relationship between inside and outside) challenge not just Jameson's concept of free-floating affects, Lyotard's notion of intensity, Massumi's concepts of autonomous affect and onto-power, and Leys' critique of affect theory, but the very divide between modernism and postmodernism.

This article is a result of the research project J6-4625 "Names at the Tip of the Nose" and the research program P6-0252 "Philosophical Investigations," both funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency.

Bibliography

Altieri, Charles. "Affect, Intentionality, and Cognition: A Response to Ruth Leys." *Critical Inquiry* 38, 4 (2012): 878–81.

Anderson, B. "Affective Atmospheres." *Emotion, Space and Society* 2 (2009): 77–81.

Benjamin, Jessica. *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1988.

———. *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference*. New Haven (CT): Yale University Press, 1995.

———. *Beyond Doer and Done To: Recognition Theory, Intersubjective Psychoanalysis, and the Third*. New York: Routledge, 2018.

Bergmann, Gustav. "Strawson's Ontology." *The Journal of Philosophy* 57 (1960): 601–22.

———. "Stenius on the Tractatus: A Special Review." *Theoria* 29 (1963): 176–204.

Böhme, G. *The Aesthetics of Atmospheres*. Ed. Jean-Paul Thibaud. New York: Routledge, 2017.

Bou Ali, Nadia, and Surti Singh. "The Concept of Extimacy." In: *Extimacy*, 1–7. Eds. Nadia Bou Ali and Surti Singh. Evanston (IL): Northwestern University Press, 2024.

Britton, Andrew. "The Myth of Postmodernism: The Bourgeois Intelligentsia in the Age of Reagan." *CineAction* 13-14 (1988): 3–7.

Çelik, Alexander Z. *Kinaesthetic Knowing: Aesthetics, Epistemology, Modern Design*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017.

Clough, Patricia Ticineto, and Jean Halley, eds. *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Durham (NC): Duke University Press, 2007.

Damasio, Antonio. *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*. New York: Avon Books, 2005.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane. New York: Penguin Classics, 1977.

———. *Mille plateaux. Capitalisme et schizophrénie 2*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1980.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatari Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.

Ekman, Paul. *Emotion in the Human Face*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

———. "An Argument for Basic Emotions." *Cognition and Emotion* 6, 3-4 (1992): 169–200.

Ekman, Paul, and Wallace V. Friesen. *Unmasking the Face: A Guide to Recognizing Emotions from Facial Clues*. Englewood Cliffs (NJ): Prentice Hall, 1975.

Evans, Dylan. *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Fink, Bruce. *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*. Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 1995.

Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Routledge, 1970.

———. *The Birth of the Clinic*. Trans. Allan Sheridan. New York: Pantheon, 1973.

Frank, Adam, and Elizabeth A. Wilson. "Critical Response. Like-Minded." *Critical Inquiry*, 38 (2012): 870–7.

Frank, Adam, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins." In: *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, 1–28. Eds. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Frank Adam. Durham (NC): Duke University Press, 1995.

Freud, Sigmund. "A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis." In: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 17, 135–44. Trans. and ed. James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 2001.

Gregg, Melissa, and Gregory J. Seigworth, eds. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham (NC): Duke University Press, 2010.

Hacker, P. M. S. "The Linguistic Turn in Analytic Philosophy." In: *The Oxford Handbook of The History of Analytic Philosophy*, 926–47. Ed. Michale Beaney. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Henderson, Greig. "Review: *Philosophical Turns: Epistemological, Linguistic, and Metaphysical* by Robert V. Wess." *The Journal of the Kenneth Burke Society* 16, 1 (2023).

Hirschman, Albert O. *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before Its Triumph*. Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 2013.

Howes, David. "Afterword. The Sensory Revolution Comes of Age." *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 39 (2021): 128–37.

———. *Sensorium: Contextualizing the Senses and Cognition in History and Across Cultures*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham (NC): Duke University Press, 1991.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–1955*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Sylvana Tomaselli. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

———. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Dennis Porter. New York: W. W. Norton, 1997.

Leys, Ruth. "The Turn to Affect: A Critique." *Critical Inquiry* 3 (2011): 434–72.

———. "Facts and Moods: Reply to My Critics." *Critical Inquiry* 4 (2012): 882–91.

———. *The Ascent of Affect: Genealogy and Critique*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017.

Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.

Manning, Erin, and Brian Massumi. *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Massumi, Brian. "The Autonomy of Affect." *Cultural Critique* 31 (1995): 83–109.

———. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham (NC): Duke University Press, 2002.

Miller, Jacques-Alain. "Extimité." *Prose Studies* 11, 3 (1988): 121–31.

Paul, H. J. "The Postcritical Turn: Unravelling the Meaning of 'Post' and 'Turn'." In: *Writing the History of the Humanities: Questions, Themes and Approaches*, 305–24. Ed. Herman Paul. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022.

Riedel, Friedlind. "Atmosphere." In: *Affective Societies: Key Concepts*, 85–95. Eds. Jan Slaby and Christian von Scheve. New York: Routledge, 2019.

Rorty, Richard M. "Ten Years After." In: *The Linguistic Turn*, 361–70. Ed. Richard M. Rorty. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

———. "Twenty-five Years After." In: *The Linguistic Turn*, 371–74. Ed. Richard M. Rorty. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Roudinesco, Élisabeth. *Jacques Lacan*. Trans. Barbara Bray. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Schaefer, Donovan. "Rationalist Nostalgia: A Critical Response to Ruth Leys' 'The Ascent of Affect.'" *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry* 3 (2022): 115–35.

Schmitz, H. *Der Gefühlsraum. System der Philosophie 3*. Baden-Baden: Verlag Karl Alber, 2019.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham (NC): Duke University Press, 2003.

Spinoza, Benedict de. "Ethics." In: *A Spinoza Reader*, 85–265. Ed. and trans. Edwin Curely. Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 1994.

Tomkins, Silvan S. *Affect Imagery Consciousness. Vol. 1, The Positive Affects*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1962.

———. *Affect Imagery Consciousness. Vol. 2, The Negative Affects*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1963.

———. *Affect Imagery Consciousness. Vol. 3, The Negative Affects: Anger and Fear*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, 1991.

Zupančič, Alenka. "Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself?!" *Problemi International* 3 (2019): 89–108.

Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1989.

———. *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*. London: Routledge, 1992.