

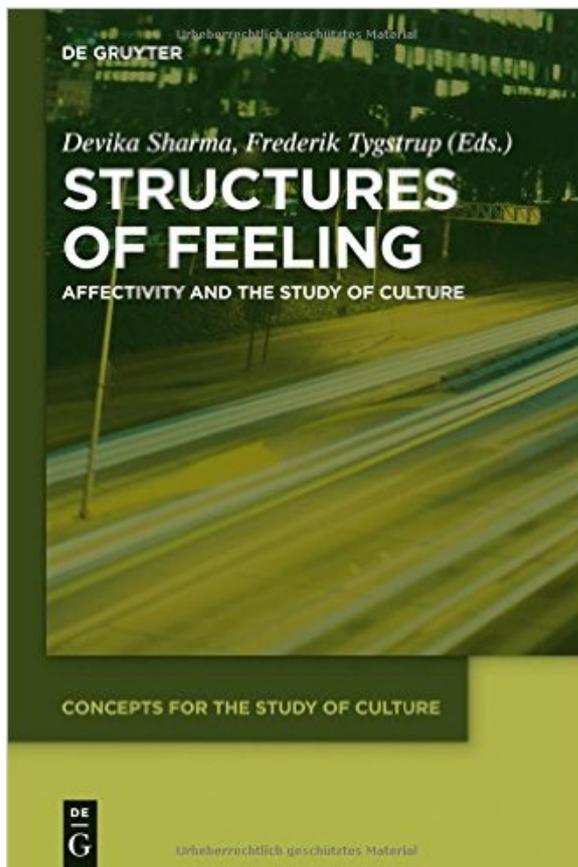
## BOOK REVIEW

### *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the Study of Culture*

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***Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the  
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Raymond William's notion of "structures of feeling" serves as the starting point for this timely collection of essays. Edited by Devika Sharma and Frederik Tygstrup, *Structures of Feeling: Affectivity and the Study of Culture* explores the innumerable ways in which contemporary life has become increasingly affect-driven. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, for example, argue that affectivity is essential to the ways in which everyday life is organized by what they call the "post-fordist" capitalist economy (2000). For Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, how we understand literature, art, and other forms of cultural transmission is no longer dominated by signs and linguistic analysis but by the production of presence, the ways in which meaning is evoked through affective medium (2004). "There is thus an urgency to understand and theorise affects and affectivity", Sharma and Tygstrup argue, "simply in order to understand what is happening around us" (2015: 3).

Affectivity, of course, is a contentious, equivocal concept. On the one hand, some theorists understand affect in terms of externality and bodily intensities. Gilles Deleuze's *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (2001) is seminal to this strand of affect theory, in addition to the work of Brian Massumi. This vector has at its core the concept of "affective economies" and the sets of corporeal and social relations it implies (Sharma and Tygstrup, 2015: 8). For Deleuze and Massumi, externality and relationality are emphasized over internality and the individual. On the other hand, psychologist Silvan Tomkins understands affect to be an essential motivational force for humans. This approach, furthered by thinkers like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, emphasizes the interiority of individuals over relationality as such (Sharma and Tygstrup, 2015: 7-8).

An enormous strength of this volume lies in Sharma and Tygstrup's insistence on an interdisciplinary, polyvalent approach. Rather than throwing their weight around in the debate over how affectivity is to be understood, the editors use the fundamental openness and ambivalence of Williams' concept of "structures of feeling" as a starting point. Noting that Williams hardly theorizes his notion in *Marxism and Literature*, Sharma and Tygstrup argue that his insistence on phenomenal experience, or "lived presence", is key to understanding what the volume seeks to accomplish (2015: 1). Its fundamental openness and immediacy makes lived experience the starting point for the explorations and theorizations of affectivity attempted by these essays. In this way, each essay can be understood as staking its own claim in how the notion of affectivity is to be understood and utilized.

*Structures of Feeling* is divided into four sections. The first, *Producing Affect*, explores the ways in which affectivity is produced, transmitted, and intensified by new media. This section includes essays on a wide-range of topics that include mass media,

trans porn, Serbian film, and installation art (2015: 17). The second section, titled *Affective Pasts*, explores relations between history, memory, and affect. Central to this section is an engagement of the ways in which historical contexts shape the ways in which emotions are experienced. The third section, *Affective Thinking*, “attends to affective-performative, and thus post-representational, ways of thinking” (2015: 17). Rather than exploring how these ways of modes of thought could inform the study of affect and its theorization, this section aims to show the ways in which affectivity has already been understood as a valuable source of knowledge by writers like Virginia Woolf and Pierre Klossowski. *Circulating Affect*, the last section, engages the ways in which affectivity is produced and understood in the contemporary, networked world.

The first section is inaugurated by “Mediashock”, an essay by media theorist Richard Grusin. Here, the concept “mediashock” is used to explore “the mood or atmosphere of shock or crisis that US media in the twenty-first century work simultaneously to create and contain” (2015: 30). Grusin provides a compelling argument for the ways in which events are interpreted by mass media in order to create certain affective responses. Central to this essay, indeed its core strength, is its implementation of the concept “premediation,” which is more fully theorized in Grusin’s monograph on media and affectivity in the wake of 9/11, titled *Premeditation: Affect and Mediality After 9/11* (2010). The notion of premediation is used in order to articulate the ways in which possible scenarios, especially shocking ones, are anticipated and articulated in order to channel affective responses. In the contemporary mediascape, Grusin theorizes, media networks are increasingly reliant on the exploration of catastrophic, shocking possibilities in order to channel viewer responses in a certain direction. Following Naomi Klein in her book *Shock Doctrine* (2007), Grusin ultimately concludes that what we are seeing is a “‘mediashock doctrine’ of disaster capitalism”, which is functioning on the ontological level in order to ensure the perpetual functioning of global capitalism (2015: 38-39).

The rest of the essays in the first part section, *Producing Affect*, are equally strong and approach the production and mediation of affectivity in disparate ways. The second essay, titled “Parsing Affective Economies of Race, Sexuality, and Gender: The Case of ‘Nasty Love’”, explores the ways in which affect theory, when coupled with transgender studies and queer theory, can lead to novel understandings of the human subject. This essay by Eliza Steinbock is recommended for anyone interested in an elucidation of the Deleuze-Massumi brand of affectivity. Trans porn is used as a case study to illustrate how this vector of theory emphasizes affective economies and relationality over more traditional conceptions of the subject. The third essay, “Affect Image, Touch Imagine”, also draws influence from Deleuze. Katrine Dickinck-Holmfeld uses Deleuze’s writings

on film in tandem with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's theorization of affectivity in order to explore the ontological status of digital images and their relation to the past.

In "Introducing Wounds: Challenging the 'Crap Theory of Pain' in Nikola Lezaić's *Tilva Roš*", Mirko Milivojevic engages with Serbian cinema in order to explore how the body and corporeal relations can take on affective, political dimensions. Although Milivojevic's essay mostly focuses on *Tilva Roš*, a film about disenchanted teenagers filming Jackass type stunts in contemporary Serbia, the ways in which bodily experimentation and affective relations are explored follow the trajectory taken by Eliza Steinbock in "Parsing Affective Economies of Race Sexuality, and Gender", emphasizing affective corporeality as the site of political engagement. This emphasis is continued in the next essay, "Affect, Bio-politics and the Field of Contemporary Performing Arts". Here, Anja Bajda uses affect theory in tandem with contemporary aesthetics in order to argue that postdramatic theater is the site of emancipatory political potential. Although Bajda's argument does feel overly optimistic, her sole reasoning being that theatrical performance is by definition biopolitical (2015: 68), the ways in which she incorporates recent writings on performance, affect, and the body are strong. At the heart of her approach lies Jacques Rancière's conception of the emancipated spectator, which locates relationality and corporeality as the site of aesthetic and political engagement (2009). The last essay in this section, "Reflections on Fear as a Structure of Feeling in Large Scale Installations in Contemporary Art", uses Rancière's concept to engage with a specific mode of affect — fear. Heloïse Lauraire studies installation art in order to further understand how immersive artworks function as "material conversions of structures of feeling", producing similar affects in a large number of participants (2015: 81).

The second section, *Affective Pasts*, begins with an essay by Esther Peeren, titled "Compelling Affects / Structured Feelings: Remembering 9/11". This piece uses what Peeren calls the "spectacularization of mourning" in order to understand how the memory of 9/11 was shaped by political and affective relations (2015: 89). Of particular interest is the way in which Peeren questions the "more celebratory forms of affect theory" (2015: 94-95). Peeren argues that emphasizing presence, vitality, and immediacy might suggest a blissful ignorance that is itself implicit in the reproduction of capital relations. The section's second essay, "Staging Emotions: On Configurations of Emotional Selfhood, Gendered Bodies, and Politics in the late Eighteenth Century", contributes to what the author calls "a genealogy of affect" (2015: 98). Rather than perceiving emotions as innate and immediate aspects of selfhood, Tine Damsholt explores "the emergence of a new emotional and civic self" in late eighteenth century

Europe, using Copenhagen as a case study in showing how such structures of feeling are historical and mediated (2015: 98).

The last three essays in this section deal with what Gumbrecht calls the “production of presence” in literary modes of representation (2004). These pieces, while all recommended, are a bit narrower in their approach and intended for a more specialized readership, namely those interested in affect-driven approaches to literature and literary theory. In “Nostalgia and Nostophobia: Emotional Memory in Joseph Roth and Herta Müller”, Martin Baake-Hansen argues that analysis of affectivity and the production of affects is central to understanding how literary representations of the past function. The final two essays each use cognitive approaches to affectivity, exemplifying the growing trend of affect studies emphasizing interiority and individuality over exteriority and affective economies (2015: 7-8). In “Affects as Stabilizers of Memory?,” Christiane Struth employs findings in cognitive studies and neuropsychology in order to explore the role affect plays in the creation and narration of personal memories. Similarly, in “The Past Beats Inside Me Like a Second Heart”, Stephanie Frink uses John Banville’s novel *The Sea* (2005) as a case study in examining the role affect and narrative mediation play in reconstructing memory.

The third section, *Affective Thinking*, begins with an essay by Clare Hemmings. Like the inaugural essays of the first and second sections of the volume, “Affect and Feminist Methodology, Or What Does it Mean to be Moved?” is quite broad and theoretical in approach, providing an introduction of sorts to the themes and concepts explored by the rest of the essays in the section. As the central foci of this section are the ways in which the theorization of affect “attends to [...] post-representational ways of thinking” (2015: 17), Hemming’s essay is very helpful in engaging with the trajectory in the humanities that led from the “linguistic turn” of deconstruction to the “affective turn” of today. The essay argues that feminist theory and methodology holds an important position in debates over contemporary “question[s] of knowledge and community”, concluding that affectivity might provide a viable alternative to the models of the subject criticized by post-structuralist theory (2015: 154). This essay is highly recommended for readers interested in theorizing selfhood, and may serve as an introduction of sorts for the role affect could play in building a constructive politics and understanding of social life after the ubiquitously skeptical project of deconstruction.

Like many of the essays in the second section, the majority of essays following “Affect and Feminist Methodology” explore the role affect plays in literature. Robert G. Ryder’s “The Curious Case of Affective Hospitality” uses ideas developed by Jacques Derrida in *Of Hospitality* (2000) in tandem with Pierre Klossowski’s fiction in order to explore how notions like affect and curiosity “allow [...] for a singular openness” that is

the basis for ethical relations (2015: 166). The following two essays explore the role affectivity plays in the writings of Virginia Woolf. The final essay in this section, “Towards a New Thinking on Humanism in Fernand Deligny’s Network”, is an exploration of the role affective relations play in the networked model of human subjectivity proposed by Fernand Deligny. While interesting in its elucidation of concepts theorized by Deligny, namely the “arachnidan”, this essay may strike readers as oddly anachronistic. Marlon Miguel’s essay seems to suggest that a networked approach to human subjectivity is completely novel, citing Deleuze heavily while failing to explore similarities between his own proposals and the schizoanalysis theorized by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (1983) and *Thousand Plateaus* (1987).

The fourth and final section, *Circulating Affect*, focuses on the ways in which affectivity is transmitted through networks of communication. Most of the essays in this section, unfortunately, lack the theoretical rigor possessed by many of the previous entries in the volume. These essays explore affective relations in video blogs (“Sympathetic Mobilisation” and “Experiences of Assisted Reproduction in Video Blogs”), women’s magazines (“Articulations of Well-being in Images of Beauty and Health”), Chinese culture (“The Characteristics of Traditional Chinese Theories of Affect”), and in online communication between fans and celebrities (“A Strategic Romance?”). This section as a whole, while providing potentially helpful illustrations of the circulation of affect in certain instances, lacks engagement with the theoretical debates that are the focus and strength of this volume. One notable exception, however, can be found in Lauren Greyson’s “How to meet the ‘Strange Stranger’: A Sketch for an Affective Biophilia” (2015: 243). This essay highlights the possibilities affect theory may have for the growing fields of ecosophy, animal ethics, and environmental ethics. Greyson effectively employs affective relations as a means for theorizing the relationship between nature and the human, arguing that what she calls “affective biophilia” can provide solid grounds for re-evaluating traditional concepts of the human subject while also enabling humans to engage in ethical practices.

Overall, this volume is highly recommended for anyone interested in affectivity. It provides a substantial engagement with the numerous, divergent ways in which the concept is understood and used today, showing the importance of the “affective turn” for contemporary culture. The first section, *Producing Affect*, is greatly reflective of this diversity, containing essays that highlight the importance of affective relations in understanding mass media, contemporary aesthetics, digital art, and politics. The second and third sections, while devoted less to the theorization of affect, explore the importance of the concept for cognitive studies and literary studies. The broader, more theoretical engagement of the first section, although less apparent in these sections as a

whole, is continued in two essays from these sections – Hemmings’ “Affect and Feminist Methodology” and Peeren’s “Compelling Affects / Structured Feelings: Remembering 9/11”. The last section, *Circulating Affect*, is a bit weaker. Many of the essays in this part fail to highlight what is at stake in theorizing and understanding affectivity, and do not fully explain why contemporary readers should care about the issues explored. With one or two exceptions, notably “How to meet the “Strange Stranger:’ A Sketch for an Affective Biophilia”, the last section can go unread by those who aren’t explicitly interested in the specific topics addressed by these essays.

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