Original Article

Politics and affect

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Abstract Until very recently Political Studies has largely ignored the role of the human passions. Understanding the difference between emotion and affect seems vital to this task, as without the latter emotion becomes cognitivised and over-civilised. In this article, we examine some of the contributions of psychoanalysis and continental philosophy to our understanding of affect. We examine the corporeal and ambivalent nature of affect, which provides the basis for what we call the vicissitudes of human feeling, that is, the way in which different feelings connect or disconnect from one another in complex, indeterminate and surprising ways. We use a detailed examination of the vicissitudes of grief and grievance as they contribute to *ressentiment*, a sentiment that is a particular characteristic of reactionary forms of populism. Passion can only ever be partly tamed and civilised and this is what provides politics with its excitements and terrors.
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Domesticated Feelings

> … concerned that social constructionist understandings of emotion, which dominate the literature, have tended to tame feelings by rendering them in overly cognitive terms, my interest is in carving out a conceptual space … for the noncognitive, nonconscious, non-linguistic, and nonrational aspects of the general phenomenon of emotion (Gould, 2009, p. 19).

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This quote from Gould identifies one of the issues we wish to address in this article. For Gould, the form of feelings that fill this conceptual space are the affects, and in this article we follow her in arguing for the value of distinguishing between affect and emotion. Most of the work based on such a distinction has its roots in the continental philosophy of Bergson and Deleuze and has been mostly situated within the field of cultural studies, philosophy, critical social psychology and psycho-social studies (Massumi, 1993, 2002; Sedgwick, 2003; Crociani-Windland, 2005, 2008; DeLanda, 2006; Blackman *et al*, 2007; Protevi, 2009; among others). Although the divergence between Deleuzian and psychoanalytic understandings is what is most often highlighted, we believe there are connectivities: aspects of psychoanalytic thinking also postulate a somatic and fluid foundation to affect that we wish to engage with and compare. Deleuze and Guattari's work has mostly been characterised as inimical to psychoanalysis; however, as Jessica Ringrose (2011, p. 3) also points out, it is both a critique and an extension of psychoanalytic and discursive interpretations. The important questions that reconnecting these trajectories raise for us are not 'which is the right one', but 'in what circumstances are some of these concepts most applicable', 'what and how do they help us to understand'.

Our premise is that distinguishing between affect and emotions offers the possibility of understanding the relatively unpredictable nature of human and socio-political emotional responses. We believe that not only perspectives derived from this stream of continental philosophy, but also understandings from psychoanalytic theory can be usefully employed to outline a spectrum of connectivity between bodily affect and more qualified and relatively more conscious emotions. We illustrate this through a specific case study charting the difference and relatedness of resentment and *ressentiment*, and by giving both negative examples of amplification of affect and positive examples of its containment. It is of course also possible to give negative examples of dampening and positive examples of amplification, which is nonetheless containing (see, for example, Crociani-Windland, 2003, 2005). What is implied in our work is an embodied, emergent and interrelated view of human emotions and cognition, which also sees the subject as embedded in a social and political field. This is congruent with John Protevi's (2009) work on political affect, but also with Bion's theory of learning. While Brian Massumi's (2002) and Eve Sedgwick's (2003) work emphasises the creative potential of the indeterminacy of affect, we chart a middle course. As Clare Hemming (2005) points out, such a view forgets that affect does not just offer creative, but also destructive potential, which Ringrose (2011) also reminds us of.

John Protevi's (2009) work with regards to what he terms 'political physiology' maps the links between Deleuzian orientations and a whole diverse field of neuroscience, complexity theory, biology and developmental systems theory. The results of interdisciplinary studies in this area or what he terms

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'affective sciences' are that 'emotion and cognition are partners in an ongoing series of emergent processes' (Protevi, 2009, p. 25); '… cognition can no longer solely be seen as simply the processing of representations, but must be seen primarily as the real-time direction of an organism's action in the world, with representation used only in certain circumstances and with affect an important component in such direction' (ibid.). We attempt to track limited aspects of the partnering of emotion and cognition and how the indeterminacy of affective bodily level of response can be influenced and qualified.

In some areas of the Social Sciences, this 'affective turn' (Clough, 2007) has been posited as offering a broader alternative to the focus on discourse that has characterised structural analysis; however, in Political Studies the significance of the human passions in political life remains relatively unacknowledged. It is not that political studies is uninterested in the human subject, but more that the psychological insights it draws upon derive from the same positivist tradition as much of Political Science itself. The subject is construed in terms of the incentives and sanctions, choices and preferences undertaken by information-processing beings, typically acting alone. This is not to say that there have not been dissenting voices within the discipline. Within studies of opinion formation, for example, a tradition of research has convincingly demonstrated that the citizen is in fact far more complex and affective than conventional wisdom assumes (Converse, 1964; Marcus, 2002; Westen, 2007).

One area where there have been clear signs of change is in the study of political protest, where prevailing models that gave emphasis to structure and, later, to 'meaning frames' have been challenged by scholars emphasising the importance of the emotions (Goodwin *et al*, 2001; Goodwin and Jasper, 2004; Gould, 2009). Two obstacles have had to be overcome. First, the view that passion, feelings affects or emotions as they have been variously spoken of, were essentially ephemeral, that they were a reaction to and/or the consequence of other events, lacking determining force in their own right. Once this objection was gradually overcome and political sociologists and theorists began to see that feelings did play a crucial role in political life, a second difficulty arose. For a variety of reasons there was a studious avoidance of any concept of human emotion that linked it to unreason. For many political sociologists, this was a reaction to the normative concept of emotion propounded by the early crowd psychologists such as Gustav le Bon (Goodwin *et al*, 2001). However, because of this concern to show that the emotions did not suddenly make citizens irrational, there has been a tendency within Political Studies to draw upon the emotions in a rationalist way, rather than question the assumption that non-rational aspects of life are necessarily irrational, therefore negative or irrelevant. What has been emphasised is the intentionality and relationality of feelings such as shame or hope (Kemper, 1978). For example, in the work of Martha Nussbaum (2001) feelings have been brought back in but they have been thoroughly cognitivised, as if their visceral and embodied nature was

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insignificant. Feelings have been treated as if they were of the same nature and operated only under the rules of cognitive logic and in the process homogenised and domesticated, the latter is something that psychoanalysis itself has been accused of by Deleuze and Guattari (1984, 1999). In so doing, what is vital about political feelings – their potential for unruliness and unpredictability, in other words their paradoxical and indeterminate foundation – has been lost.

Our argument in this article is that at heart what may be missing from such approaches is a broader and at the same time more differentiated analysis of the interaction between levels of experience, which in turn may help map what we have termed 'vicissitudes of affect'. Feelings, affect and emotion are terms defined and used in different ways by different authors and often used interchangeably (see Baraitser and Frosh, 2007; Blackman and Cromby, 2007; Cromby, 2007 or Shotter, 2007 in Blackman *et al*, 2007 among others for reviews of their various uses and definitions). We reserve the term 'affect' to describe the more bodily based and indeterminate level of experience, while using the term 'emotion' to refer to experience that has undergone qualification as it enters into a more discursive level. We use the term 'feelings' to denote the general area within which we make those distinctions along a spectrum of continuity between body and mind, individual and society, nature and culture. We then identify some of the different ways by which affect can undergo transformation and qualification.

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The Unruly Nature of Affect

In developing a position that sees the role of feelings as central to politics and society, we must develop a strong case for seeing feelings as a force that bring a dynamic indeterminacy to life in general and to the political process in particular. Crucially, this is about the element of spontaneity and chaos as opposed to order and control in politics, an issue that has been a constant point of argument from before the debate between Lenin and Luxembourg (Mattick, 1978) to the present day. To assemble this case, we believe a number of steps and distinctions are necessary. First, we must recognise both the cognitive and the somatic dimension of feelings, using the concept of emotion where the cognitive component is strongest and affect where the somatic component is strongest. Second, we need to understand that human feelings are governed by their own logics and regularities. As we shall see, Freud (1915b) thinks of this in terms of the 'vicissitudes' of feelings, whereas Deleuze and Guattari (1999, p. xvi) see affect as 'a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another', that is, as non linear, embodied and ambivalent (Massumi, 2002).

In this article, we will explore these two steps in greater detail: first through a detailed case study, which begins with Freud's reflections on melancholia and

moves into an exploration of *ressentiment* and populism. We then deepen the analysis of this case study at the hand of some currents within psychoanalysis and continental philosophy, and second, by examining the vicissitudes of affect, that is, the way in which its primary features of intensity and relative indeterminacy can be subject to transformation and manipulation. This understanding offers a ground for political analysis and demonstrates the centrality of human passions to political studies. In this time of economic uncertainty and increasing civic unrest, we believe the case study that follows is highly topical.

Ressentiment: The Vicissitudes of Affect

Recently and largely prompted by developments in post-colonial studies, there has been growing interest in understanding the role of loss in the formation of subaltern identities (Eng and Kazanjian, 2003). Much of this literature takes Freud's *Mourning and Melancholia* (Freud, 1917) as its starting point and applies it to the broader experiences of race, class and gender. Judith Butler argues that the shadow of loss leaves its mark on all subaltern identities – the loss of one's own history (as history is largely not written by the powerless), the loss of a sense of the achievements of one's group or class, the loss of valued role models, icons and heroes present or past, the absence of culturally desirable human qualities in the identity of black, working class, woman or queer (Butler, 1997). The loss is ungrievable because the symbolic means of understanding this loss are not available. In addition, it is here that Butler invokes the concept of 'foreclosure' to describe this absence of a means of representation (history, literature and so on) of a group's own experience. Unable to grieve, subaltern communities are constituted by melancholia, a feeling state that is primarily affective.

As Freud notes, whereas mourning is always related to some kind of tangible loss (when we grieve, we grieve with an object in mind), in melancholia 'one cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost'; he adds, 'melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness' (1917, p. 245). The melancholic lacks consciousness of the cause of his suffering, the affect seeks an object to which its grievance can be addressed. Sometimes writers in this post-colonial tradition appear to confuse melancholia with melancholy. Melancholy is part of the sweet sadness of loss but melancholia is the bleak, visceral, agitated, desperate experience of a loss with no name. As we have seen, Butler argues that if the symbolic means of representing and working through loss are unavailable then the loss will remain ungrievable. We believe this melancholia is an element of what Bourdieu (1999) calls 'social suffering', an abiding affect of the oppressed, excluded and marginalised (Frost and Hoggett, 2008).

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In *Mourning and Melancholia,* Freud notes the fluid boundary between grief and grievance, and how bitterness at one's loss can so easily become melancholic self-reproach. But what if the loss is experienced by a group? Perhaps, then such internalised bitterness has significant political consequences. Max Scheler (1992) argued that under certain political conditions melancholia takes on the form of *ressentiment*, a phenomenon that has been widely noted in studies of populism, particularly in its reactionary dimension. Resentment is the angry feeling a group has when it feels it has been wronged and when it directs this feeling towards the real source of injustice rather than an object of fantasy, an 'out group'. Thus, resentment is an emotion that fuels the struggle for social and political rights, such as the civil rights movement in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. In contrast, *ressentiment* is an affective state characteristic of the politically weak and powerless. Nietzsche called it a slave emotion, and it is typically provoked when people feel that they have to do without or give up something and yet no body, no party or no institution will stand up for them. First published in 1913, Max Scheler saw *ressentiment* arising when people react to a perceived injustice by repressing their feelings of resentment and revenge. The repression occurs because of the weakness and impotence of those holding these feelings, an impotence that prevents them from expressing their feelings openly out of fear of the authorities. Thus, they remain passive and powerless, it is neither resignation nor revolt, but a sullen and resentful oscillation between the two.

> *Ressentiment* is a self-poisoning of the mind which has quite definite causes and consequences. It is a lasting mental attitude, caused by the systematic repression of certain emotions and affects which, as such, are normal components of human nature. (Scheler, 1992, p. 117)

Within the tradition of continental philosophy, *Ressentiment* is based on a sickness, which involves a predominance of remembering over forgetting, where the response to life is based on old grudges, which can never be properly digested, rather than on immediacy of experience. Just as Deleuze (1983, p. 107) says that 'Nietzsche is not simply saying that *ressentiment* is a sickness, but rather that sickness as such is a form of *ressentiment*', thus Bergson says 'That which is commonly held to be a disturbance of the psychic life itself, an inward disorder, a disease of the personality, appears to us, from our point of view, to be an unloosing or breaking of the tie which binds this psychic life to its motor accompaniment, a weakening or an impairing of our attention to outward life' (1988 [orig. 1896], pp. 14–15). Health (and therapy), thus understood would require release of the psyche from an indulgent, and somewhat seductive, involvement with unconscious memory traces and a re-balancing towards an active relationship with an external reality. Both Nietzsche's and Bergson's ideas chime with Freud's formulation of the difference between mourning and melancholia. The man of *ressentiment* is characterised by Nietzsche as 'dyspeptic', unable to be done with anything, just as

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Freud's melancholic is caught in a ruminative memory, which can never achieve full digestion and, as in Bergson's characterisation, has lost connection with external reality.

In the quote above, Scheler appeared to equate emotion and affect, but it is fascinating to observe how in other places Scheler (1992, pp. 118–119) struggles to differentiate between the two feeling states. He notes, for example, that in contrast to an emotion such as spite or revenge, which has a definite object or target, *ressentiment* is characterised by 'indeterminate groups of objects'. In other words, like other affects such as anxiety, *ressentiment* is free-floating. As Scheler notes, 'repression does not only stretch, change, and shift the original object, it also affects the emotion itself. Since the affect cannot outwardly express itself, it becomes active within. Detached from their original objects, the affects melt together into a venomous mass which begins to flow whenever consciousness becomes momentarily relaxed' (ibid, p. 134). *Ressentiment* is a contagious (ibid, p. 119) affect that can be given shape or form by political movements and leaders but then, by being fixed in this way, it ceases to be what it is, an affect, and becomes, for a while at least, the psycho-somatic foundation for an emotion such as scorn or contempt.

In *ressentiment*, the sense of grievance is turned in upon the self, but in a way that gives pleasure. In other words, the grievance is nursed. It is held onto for the consolatory pleasures to be derived from it, specifically the perverse and masochistic enjoyment of complaint. Scheler notes, 'it is peculiar to "*ressentiment* criticism" that it does not seriously desire that its demands be fulfilled. It does not want to cure evil: the evil is merely a pretext for the criticism' (ibid, p. 121). This links to what Edward Shils described as the 'inverted inegalitarianism' of populism – while in reality 'the people' may be weak at least through their complaints and criticisms they have the consolation of a kind of moral superiority, 'the people are not just the equal of their rulers; they are actually better than their rulers' (Shils, 1956, p. 101).

The sting of authority is both resented and enjoyed in a manner very similar to what Glynos and Stavrakakis (2008) have called 'self-transgressive enjoyment'. To the extent that populist leaders such as Hugo Chavez collude with and exploit rather than confront such impulses, the seeds of authoritarianism are sown within initially progressive populist movements. What is fostered is a projective dynamic, which finds a target for the indigestible parts of experience, but never in ways that might involve self-examination or facilitate containment and transformation, something we will examine in more detail later.

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The Relative Autonomy of Affect

The idea of affect was central to Freud's thinking from the inception of his psychoanalytic explorations the concept constantly appears, for example, in the

Interpretation of Dreams. Freud used the concept of affect to draw attention to the energetic dimension of the drive and contrasted the affect to what he termed 'the idea' (the mental representation of the drive) (Freud, 1915a). His classic paper on the drives was called *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes* (Freud, 1915b) and there he repeatedly emphasised that the most contingent thing about a drive was the idea or object. The sexual drive, for example, can find satisfaction in a vast range of objects, from various parts of one's own and the other's body, via fetish objects to sublimates of various forms (including consumer goods and objects of intellectual enquiry). It follows that the affect is not bound to the object, far from defining the nature of the affect, the object is the most contingent aspect of it.

The affect is the psycho-somatic force or 'pressure', 'a pressure that is relatively indeterminate both as regards the behaviour it induces and as regards the satisfying object' (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973, p. 214). In their discussion of affect Laplanche and Pontalis (ibid, pp. 13–14) note that the drive expresses itself in two interlinked forms that Freud calls the idea and the affect, the affect is the 'subjective transposition of the quantity of instinctual energy' (ibid, p. 14). Affect is vital, provides energy, is unruly and untamed, it seeks an object in the form of some kind of representation (the idea) but, as Freud always insisted, this object is the most contingent part of the impulse. Even more fundamentally, Massumi (2002, pp. 24–28) following Deleuze and Bergson in most of his work, not only sees affect as somatic, intensive, ambivalent and operating non-linearly, but makes a further important distinction: affect is autonomous. This does not mean that it does not have a relationship to what he sees as a parallel level of emotion. At this level, the affect is qualified, but in the process it is also transformed, as noted by Scheler, it is no longer affect and partakes of a cognitive element, it enters into a signifying order. This transformation nonetheless can never be complete, there is always an affective remainder. The disconnection is as important as the connectivity, because it allows a relationship of 'resonation or interference, amplification or dampening', rather than 'of conformity or correspondence' (Massumi, 2002, p. 24). We will return to this later.

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Affect, Ambivalence and Emotions

Somewhat related, but not quite the same, is the idea that the fluid nature of affect is manifest in its ambivalence, the archetypical form of which is love/hate. Yet this only serves a purpose of characterisation, where in simple binary terms we can try to approach a level of indeterminacy open to the paradoxical unresolved coexistence of opposite responses, or in Massumi's (2002, p. 24) terms 'the crossing of semantic wires …', as well as the nuanced qualification of human emotions that most of us are capable of: these can be exquisitely complex, such as the appreciation of bitter tastes. Language fails in that by being too specific, it is

paradoxically imprecise in approaching areas of indeterminacy. Art and poetry can come closer than normal speech to expressing paradox, ambivalence and complexity, yet even these forms of expression cannot express pure intensity. It is from this affective foundation that emotions are generated and qualified as such. Returning to our original argument, human feelings manifest themselves through different levels of experience from affect to emotion. Feelings are powerfully influenced by their vicissitudinal, fluid, ambivalent and paradoxical foundation in affect. Consequently, many feelings exist in an intimate and dynamic relation to others – love/hate, grief/grievance, shame/pride, despair/hope (in a similar vein Moscovici (1985, pp. 275–280) notes the relationship between panic and terror and what he calls the 'oscillation' between fear and violence) – so that there is often a regular but unpredictable oscillation from one to the other. Debbie Gould has examined the shame/pride axis and its relation to gay and lesbian politics in the United States during the AIDS crisis (Gould, 2001, 2002) and Paul Hoggett has explored the oscillation between grief and grievance in the politics of the Mothers of the Disappeared in Argentina (Hoggett, 2009). This switching or flipping from one feeling state to another cannot be fully captured through the concept of ambivalence, where opposing feelings coexist in the mind. Whereas love/hate and shame/pride appear to meet this definition, it is inaccurate to say that grief and grievance are 'opposites'. Thus, it would seem that ambivalence corresponds to one form of indeterminacy, but does not exhaust all the possible vicissitudes.

Returning to Freud's discussion of the drive for the moment, the object (and its representation, the idea) gives meaning to what otherwise would be experienced simply as a psycho-somatic intensity and anchors this disturbance in language and culture, in this way the affective disturbance becomes manifest as an emotion. Discourse therefore binds or contains affect, but only contingently. Affect constantly threatens to break through, decathecting the objects that it has given temporary allegiance to. This fluidity, but also connectivity or relationality, something Freud included in his concept of *Triebe* or drive, in Deleuzian terms, is a property of affective dynamics.

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Affective Communication and Containment

For object-relations theorists (Klein, Winnicott, Bion and so on), experience always threatens us with excess. Margot Waddell captures this vividly when she cites George Eliot from Middlemarch: 'If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence' (Waddell, 1989). For object-relations theory, this is a reminder of the inherent limitations of language for expressing 'sensuous experience' the raw elements of which Bion (1970) refers to as 'beta elements'.

Given the limitations of verbal communication, object-relations theory also places great emphasis on the communication of affect unmediated by language, something conceived by Klein, in terms of projective identification. One of the major innovations of the object-relations tradition, the centrality of the counter-transference in clinical practice, denotes the process whereby A's affective communications are received and understood by B, the analyst (Redman, 2009). The use of the counter-transference is central to most contemporary psychoanalytic practice and marks a radical departure from its classical origins; the prominence given to the use of the counter-transference denotes the primacy that is now given to the patient's affective rather than discursive communication.

Bion deepens this understanding of affective communication through his concept of the container/contained relationship. B, through her receptivity, acts as a container for A's projective identifications, which are thereby contained. By contained, Bion does not mean 'suppressed' nor simply left (as one might leave something somewhere to be collected later) for B does not simply 'receive' the affective communication, B also processes it. The prototype is the infant/mother relation, through the mother's capacity to contain her infant's experience 'something which in the infant was near-sensory and somatic was transformed into something more mental … which could be used for thought or stored as memory' (Britton, 1992, p. 105). Digestion is the metaphor used by Bion to characterise how β elements are processed into α elements. Bion speaks of α elements as dreamlike and pictorial and as constituting the first articulations on which thinking may find a basis (Bion Talamo, 1997). He is describing a passage towards symbolisation and thought. Bion (1970) indicates that the container/contained relationship can be parasitic as well as symbiotic, with the former leading to mental impoverishment rather than mental growth. In other words, the symbolic resources available to an individual or group can be used for better or worse, something illustrated by populist parties and leaders as we shall see later.

At times, containment is best achieved by the demonstration that a communicated intensity can be borne, without being thrown back or given premature interpretation or a judgmental response (Winnicott, 1971, p. 92). At other times, it needs to be made sense of, qualified and named. Winnicott is important within this brief overview of connectivities between psychoanalytic and Deleuzoguattarian orientations. Guattari was a trained Lacanian analyst, but as Gary Genosko (in Guattari, 2000, p. 112) points out he built on and extended Winnicott's notion of transitional space to develop the concept of 'transversality', his major theoretical contribution. This was a response to the notion of transference, which he grew to despise as an artefact of the analysis. Within object-relations theory, Winnicott was also the one who focused on non-sexualised aspects of human development and dynamics, which he nonetheless saw as of a maximally intense nature. This chimes with the shift of focus in Deleuze and Guattari's work away from libido and towards asexual levels of connectivity and intensity. Winnicott was most emphatic in giving

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environmental influences a major role. He also came to understand aggressive as well as creative potential as emerging from an undifferentiated tendency to movement, which he first linked to appetite and which would develop into destructiveness or creativity in response to the quality of the holding environment. In addition, he was able to see a positive use of destruction. An object can only become useful, in his analysis (1971, ch. 6), by surviving its potential destruction. In other words, the other has to be resilient enough to withstand attack, questioning without retaliating. This, as we shall see, may be an aspect of why Obama's response to political attacks during his presidential campaign is a good example of a positive and resilient response.

Containment can be verbal or non-verbal. In Winnicott's view, it may be simply the survival of intensity's destructive potential. The qualification of affect, its naming of what can be disruptive intensity is already on the way to containment. The digestion, bringing into mind and symbolisation of experience provides it with meaning; in Bion's terms, symbolisation provides containment. Symbolisation, particularly through language, can fix and anchor experience, but symbolisation can also be governed by non-linear logics – in dreams, music, art and poetry it partakes in the indeterminacy of its affective sources.

Through symbolisation, experience becomes meaningful, and the more anchored affective experience becomes in discourse the more it takes on the form of emotion. Emotion, unlike affect, is meaningful (hence the stronger cognitive component in emotion). Whereas the somatic is to the fore in affect, cognition is to the fore in emotion. Emotions are therefore 'intelligent', they have an intentional quality, they 'point towards' something, they are part of the fabric of human relations (Kemper, 1978; Nussbaum, 2001). In contrast, if experience cannot be contained in meaning, if it is repressed or foreclosed, then we suffer it, and this suffering is embodied, enacted or projected. What the theories outlined indicate is a spectrum of qualification, which varies in fixity and fluidity and partakes more or less of cognitive elements. It can also be influenced unpredictably by the continuous impingement of affect that life continuously presents us with in more or less impactful ways, which is why the autonomy of affect, its non-linear functioning and indeterminacy are central to an understanding of what might happen not only in relation to individuals, but also groups and populations. Humans are social animals. Even the language used in relation to those most quantitative of transactions, those of the stock market, is not just about the numbers, but about confidence, jitteriness or anxiety: the flows of currency and the currency of feelings cannot be separated.

Static and Dynamic-Splitting and Projection Versus Reflexivity

As noted earlier, some threads and questions remain: why is it on the whole easier to think in terms of ambivalence, love/hate, shame/pride and many

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types of opposed pairings than in terms of complexity? Are these terms in the same relationship as grief/grievance, resentment/ressentiment? The qualification of affect in terms of opposites may be a social construction. In the case of the oscillation between resentment and ressentiment, in particular the notion of a duality of modalities, be they conceptualised as smooth and striated (Deleuze and Guattari, 1999), active and reactive or in Bergson's terms static and dynamic, modalities of interaction make more sense. In the case of resentment, there is connectivity between the affective level and a cognitive or sense-making capacity, which is not foreclosed. In the case of ressentiment, the subject being affected is unable to bear connection to the reality of powerlessness and the impossibility of sense making. It is an angry giving up, which cannot admit to having given up. Identifying the nature of this interrupted, partial capacity for connectivity is crucial. In this scheme, *ressentiment* is the static or reactive form or modality, whereas resentment is the active or dynamic form, where the intensity of experience is not interrupted, but is able to connect to both thought capacities and action. Common wisdom and language would say it requires courage, stomach or guts, that is, enough capacity of the body not to recoil from the intensity while trying to make sense of it. The static or reactive modality appears to us as fundamentally similar to what is conceptualised in Kleinian terms as splitting and projecting. Unfortunately, there is little scope to expand on the complexity of what is briefly alluded to here. Suffice to say that these different levels of connectivity can be triggered, amplified or contained in relation to external influences.

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Dampening and Amplification

In her introduction to the special issue on Populism of the *Journal of Political Ideologies,* Catherine Fieschi (2004) suggests that there are three essential characteristics of populism – the appeal to 'the people', the hostility towards elites, and the powerful mood that underlies populist movements and parties. This mood is *ressentiment*. It is the affective nature of *ressentiment* that renders it ripe for exploitation – the melancholia seeks an object for its grievance, and populist parties and leaders are only too happy to supply them. Here are some examples taken from recent focus group research conducted in poor White communities in the United Kingdom (Beedell *et al*, 2010):

> There's this young girl across the road from me in a 3 bed house and she's on her own … and she's got children but cos she's got depression the social took the children away and she stays with her mother … but it don't stop her going out every night with blokes.

> (On polish workers in the building trade) '… they work for £20 a day but what they forget to tell you is they go straight down the social and say I've got 5 or 6 children back in Poland gets the money off from him (the boss) cos they's not paying tax and also chucking his social money back to Poland'.
>
> I had to go to Bruton Hill one day, I once lived there in the block of flats and I asked this woman what are they building there and she said 4 bed houses…she said don't even look at them, you cant have them … they're for Asian friends.

These brief extracts provide a glimpse of the litany of complaints that characterised some but not all of the focus groups in which Poles, Somalis, 'Asians', teenage mothers, young people, offenders, the mentally ill and other groups were the objects of real or imagined grievances. The point being not so much whether they were real or imagined but the constant repetition of such complaints, almost in a ritualised way, and the enjoyment to be derived from such repetition. Freud notes the vital role that complaint plays in melancholia and adds, 'these complaints are really "plaints" in the old sense of the word' (Freud, 1917, p. 248) (by which he means that a plaint is both an accusation and a lamentation). To repeat Scheler's view of '*ressentiment* criticism', the complainant does not want to remove the evil rather the evil is the pretext for the criticism.

Thus, some political actors may gain by amplifying and exploiting the 'enjoyment of criticism'. This may be understood using the Deleuzian notions of dampening and amplification. Take the effect of language on experience as an example: 'There is a redundancy of resonation that plays up or amplifies … and a redundancy of signification that plays out or linearizes … Language belongs to entirely different orders depending on which redundancy it enacts' (Massumi, 2002, p. 26). It is possible to make an affective experience more or less intense by the words we choose, when speaking to someone who has undergone that experience. Thus, language may seek to encompass affect but in different ways, from the rigid, defensive discourse of the obsessive bureaucrat to the inebriating rhetoric of the populist.

Overly intense affect has ambivalent potential in terms of enjoyment: a rollercoaster ride can be felt as exhilarating by suspending us in pure sensation, or terrifying. In sport, the intense connectivity of the group of fans can be both intensely pleasurable and lead to unthinkingly violent behaviour, with dire consequences. So can political dynamics be affectively charged with the dispersed affect, mentioned earlier. This is capable of being manipulated, steered, towards amplification or dampened through articulation, which offers interpretation, meaning and the possibility of transformation rather than repetition. The immense variability, as well as regularity of political rhetoric is

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in this view only understandable because of the relative autonomy of affect and emotions. If we take this perspective, it is little wonder that media fuelled moral panics help to sell papers: they offer different possibility of response, for some they offer the exhilaration of the rollercoaster ride, for others its horror, for many both. Tabloids like the News of the World profit from the love of criticism of *ressentiment*. Even the short often ungrammatical, but affectively intense style of tabloid titles seems aimed directly to amplification of affect, maybe another way of sensationalising it, which in itself illuminates its link to sensation, its somatic aspect. Likewise, government attempts to regulate crime and violence, for example, by introducing measures such as 'Zero Tolerance' (Newburn and Jones, 2007), end up amplifying the affect by pandering to rather than containing moral panics. The charismatic despot, on the other hand, offers very hard boundaries, based not on thinking, but on affectively charged notions of difference, hence nationalism, racism and so on. In other words, splitting becomes a source of affectively charged enjoyment, where the pleasure of not having to think is not only amplified, but glorified. There is a displacement of where and what kind of boundaries are best employed in the service of collective health.

In contrast, the melancholia of *ressentiment* can be channelled in progressive political ways, and here the concept of 'containment' we introduced earlier is valuable. Symbols can also be very helpful in containing affect, because of their multivocal nature. They allow for the cognitive element not to be so strong as to totally imprison affect. Their multivocality (Turner, 1967) gives a steer to interpretation, while leaving room for different options. This contains rather than represses. It is the steer that makes the difference, which is in turn dependent on the aim and the conceptual framework of values and beliefs of the speaker. The more constructive and powerful leaders are also charismatic, but use that power to encourage and enable people to face the intensity of situations. A classic example was Obama's speech of 18 March 2008 when he talked about his links to the controversial pastor Jeremiah Wright. According to Drew Westen (2008), Obama charted a course directly into the eye of the storm that was brewing and sought the open conversation about race that the Republicans had avoided because they preferred to exploit it and the Democrats had avoided out of fear.

> He told the nation that he understood what was happening in white barber shops and black barber shops, around white water coolers and black water coolers, and that we are neither free from our prejudices nor merely prejudiced in our respective grievances, and that in both our prejudices and our grievances, we have more in common than we know. (Westen, 2008)

The leader encourages an active relationship to the outward environment (something Bergson would have approved of). This is done by offering an

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interpretation that, in Bionic terms, contains enough of the affect so as to allow people to think within and about the situation, without splitting off or acting out. The aim is to make the intensity bearable and to channel it towards thoughtful action, acknowledging and accepting limitation and hardships, which are also part of the ambivalent nature of life. It is not about absolute control or predictability, nor is it a resigned acceptance of total randomness and powerlessness (Alford, 2001).

Hemming's (2005) work gives a possibility of positioning this analysis with reference to Deleuze and Massumi. As she points out, for Deleuze (unlike Massumi), the relation between body and mind, affect and emotion is not primarily one of autonomy. We take a middle position, we see affect as both interlinked to the emotional level and relatively autonomous. The advantage of seeing it as relatively autonomous is that it allows for affect's continuous flow of influence to be always only partly conscious, it also makes sense of how at times affect can bypass transformation into emotion and reflexivity, it can go straight into what psychoanalysis might call 'acting out'. In other words, what cannot be thought will be embodied, projected or enacted and whether this is seen as essentially pathological or as potentially also creative is where Deleuzian and psychoanalytic frameworks appear to differ. On the other hand, we agree with Deleuze, and Hemming (2005, p. 564) in seeing the affective cycle 'as an ongoing, incrementally altering chain – body- affect- emotion- affect- body – doubling back upon the body and influencing the individual's capacity to act in the world'. This is why we believe that some of the concepts from psychoanalysis can be usefully employed and related to the 'affective turn'. Some might see this as an unclear positioning, which it is, if we can only think in linear and binary terms, if A is right, then B is wrong. What may be more akin to the fluid area we explore though is a logic of 'it depends'. It depends on the modality: what has been characterised earlier in terms of static and dynamic processes and the interaction between them, which in Deleuzian terms may give rise to creative 'lines of flight', but also destructive ones. It depends on the particular conditions, relations and actualisations of existence, the particular ways by which affect may be able to be amplified or dampened, connected with in a reflexive way or defended against, which we have hopefully given an example of limited exploration.

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Conclusion

The study of politics has recently begun to find a place for the role of feelings. In this article, we make a case for differentiating between emotion and affect, as well as the modalities by which they may interact. We explore several different ways in which affect has been conceptualised. More so than emotion, the concept of affect enables the acknowledgment of the unruly nature of feelings,

their embodied nature and their ambivalence. As such, affect brings indeterminacy and fluidity into political life. In this light, we consider *ressentiment* as an exemplary affect and illustrate the fluid connections between the different emotions that flow from it including grief, envy and grievance. Repression, denial, splitting and foreclosure (aspects of the logic of affect) lubricate these connections and disconnections and, when considered inter-psychically as well as intra-psychically, one can see how they provide the bridge between the psyche and the social, that is, between power, discourse and sensuous experience. The ambivalent potential of affect allows an understanding of how political interventions can dampen or amplify dispersed affects, anchor them temporarily to a particular object (migrants, anti-social youths) or, as in the case of Obama's race speech, help people think by offering containment.

A full understanding of the role of feeling in political life has barely begun and we believe that the distinction between affect and emotion, static and dynamic processes of connectivity is one of the vital starting points in the exploration of this relatively uncharted field. The political implications are considerable. Affect is contagious, it provides the energy that drives crowds and movements for better and for worse. Political parties and leaders may seek to harness such forces, but, to use an old analogy of Trotsky's, they are always like bareback riders on a lively horse. Affect therefore draws attention to the role of spontaneity in politics and to those political traditions, on the left and the right, which have emphasised the power of bottom-up politics – the power of movements and, in the case of populism, the power of 'the people'.

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