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# Cognition and Affect in Sociological Theory: Cognitive-Affective Linkages in Values, Mood, and Boundaries

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COGNITION AND AFFECT IN SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY:  
Cognitive-Affective Linkages in Values, Mood, and Boundaries

by

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we  
Find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards  
Of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

Lamb-Books, Benjamin (M.A., Sociology)

Cognition and Affect in Sociological Theory: Cognitive-Affective Linkages in Values, Mood, and Boundaries

Thesis directed by Assistant Professor Isaac Reed

## ABSTRACT

Understandings of culture have long had a cognitive bias in sociological theory. To amend this, I propose a general theory of cognitive-affective linkages that aids cultural sociology in particular, but is of relevance to many different areas of sociology. I identify several theoretical precedents, Hochschild's theory of feeling rules and gender ideology as well as a few ideas from Freudian psychoanalysis, to reconstruct an intellectual path leading to a conception of discursive affects. The general theory of these culturally channeled affects transcends many traditional dichotomies in sociological theory, e.g. between language and the body, the individual and the social, and even between culture and the economic. Three empirical sites of discursive affects are then analyzed on a meta-theoretical level: 1) Values are shared evaluative cognitions or representations of good and evil with strong affective attachments. 2) Mood is a shared affective experience, not consciously identified as such, yet influencing cognitive-social perceptions. 3) Symbolic boundaries are collective fantasies of identity maintained by the cognitive and affective work of a group. Throughout the essay, features extracted from each of these exemplars are synthesized to produce a social ontology in which cognition and affect are inseparable social-historical powers constituting individual experience and the individual as we know it.

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## **I. Cognition and Affect**

Cognitive-affective linkages pervade social life in emotions, in shared values of good and evil (Alexander 2003), in the identity performances of social movements and nationalism (Jaspers 1997; Brubaker 2009), in the social construction of gender and sexual desire (Butler 1997), and in group formation through boundary drawing (Schwalbe et al 2000; Lamont and Molnar 2002). Across diverse sociological topics and schools of theory, increasing evidence demonstrates that affective experiences accompany collective cognitive processes. I seek to propose a new understanding of how shared cognitions have varying levels of psychic charge or affective intensity.

In this essay I look at three concepts in contemporary sociological theory: values, mood, and symbolic boundaries. Each one has its own expanding cluster of apologists, and each seems to be gathering more interest and attention every year. I will analyze them here under a new light, as fellow specimens all displaying a special relationship between cognition and affect. They are cognitive-affective linkages and fibers of the social world. And they are being reexamined in 21<sup>st</sup> century sociology because of a new attitude for embracing difficult trans-disciplinary phenomena in the social sciences. Grappling with the intersection between affects—so very bodily—and cognitions—so very abstract—nudges sociological theory a little closer to our fantastic multidimensional reality.

Defining the basic terms, the first step, is no easy task. Thankfully I can root my conceptualizations of cognition and affect within two established intellectual traditions, cultural theory and psychoanalytic social theory. Cultural theory, born from symbolic anthropology, has long recognized the ideational dimension of social life. The mental beings in this dimension, socially shared cognitions, have taken on many different names over the century: typifications,

frames, symbol systems, rules, scripts, structures of meaning, etc., and while these terms may be used by theorists in different ways, they all recognize the collective nature of cognition.

Collective cognitions make communication and interaction possible, they transfigure the material world into a realm of meaning, and they create shared experiences of the world. This cognitive order, culture, adds a dimensional difference to the world: actions, words, places, customs, bodies, apparel and other signs all partake in conceptual webs of meaning, enabling and configuring the interaction of all these worldly things.

What is this cognitive order of culture? Are not cognitions a private, internal type of entity that exists within human brains possessed by individuals? How can cognitions be socially shared and somewhat externalized in social things?

Certainly the process of cognition occurs in individuals. But there are at least three different, however interconnected registers of culture, a useful distinction made by Paul DiMaggio (1997). The idiosyncratic thought processes of an individual brain are, frankly, the least effective mode of culture. As soon as an individual tries to communicate such private ideas, he or she is forced to hook them up with the already existing web of shared cognitions. The famous philosopher of language, Ludwig Wittgenstein, dismissed the very notion of a *private* language.

Second, there's a supra-individual order of shared meanings or what DiMaggio calls "schemata." This is what cultural theorists focus upon, the structures of meaning that place physical and communicative actions within a wider shared, imaginary cosmos. This register, which I will discuss, refers to the 'sense' that things have and how things seem to naturally make sense.

The last register consists of the materiality of culture, the external letter or any other body among the nearly infinite kinds of vehicles of meaning that exist. Due to the arbitrary relationship between material signifiers and the conceptual signified, this register typically isn't regarded as that important either by cultural theorists. The bodies of culture matter much more though when we take the affective dimension of culture into account. Elsewhere, literary theorists have taken an interest in the effect of the form of language, in addition to its content, upon the aesthetic-affective experience of the reader. However, I do agree that the type of culture that matters most, that serves as a blueprint at least for social interactions, is the second register: socially shared cognitions. These cognitions certainly have body, the material signifier, but they are not in themselves substantially physical.<sup>1</sup> Nor are they the spontaneous mental outbursts of more basic physical bodies.

Instead, cognitions arrange and give order to matter according to an intelligibility of their own, that is, according to their meaning. I use the word *discourse* to refer to the ordering agency of a complex of social cognitions, following Michel Foucault's use of the term (Foucault 2002). Like language, beliefs and values also have their own rules and grammar of usage, not entirely consensual or consistent in every case,<sup>2</sup> but with enough logic and power to make the world a classification table, differentiating objects and demarcating subjects. Values, mood and boundaries are all children of discourse: values are affectively hot, discursive cognitions central to the coherence or legitimacy of a discourse; mood is the affective dimension of discursive

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<sup>1</sup> Cognitions are not in themselves physical but nevertheless have physical effects, as most cultural theorists assert, including their physical effect upon the affective experience of the human body (see below).

<sup>2</sup> Discourse consists of social cognitions, which it can never pull together in a perfectly integrated whole. Social cognitions have diverse action-functions and these functions often contradict themselves within the very same discursive community. In other words, a discourse may suffer logical contradiction between its cognitions without the need for emendation. Subjects of the same discourse may find different meanings within it.



formations conjoined together in a historical situation; boundaries are the axes of classification through which discourse orders people and things.

Discourse can sound overly logical and a bit ominous though, no doubt because of its association with Foucault's anti-humanism, dismissing all "anthropological constants" of human nature. It is therefore necessary to break discourse down into its smaller parts, its cognitive components. Many philosophers and psychologists of the mind have previously analyzed cognitions as a *schematic* entity: cognitions have perceptual functions. The word 'schema' is not merely another verbose addition to the running tally of synonyms for culture. It stems from Immanuel Kant's philosophy of the mind, and Aristotle's categories before him, and its meaning is crucial for understanding the nature of human cognition.

Kant broke with his contemporary philosophers over the nature of truth and knowledge, the relationship between cognitions and things. When he wrote, "Up to now it has been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects...Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition" (1998 Bxvi), naïve realism took its deathblow. But Kant was not a theorist of culture. He thought that the human apprehension of matter and objects was decided by the universal structure of the mind. The mind constitutes objects and their relationships *through categories*, which are the conceptual condition of the possibility of knowledge and perception. Categories, thoroughly rational and universal for Kant, function *schematically* to create the human experience of the object world. Schemata are the cognitive functions of categories, programming the human perception of matter into intelligible bodies, reproducing the world according to established codes of interpretation.

Kant was wrong on one thing though. Schemata reside in the supra-individual subjective order of culture, not in the individual noggin. It is the social cognition of discourse that accomplishes the imagining, designing, and construction of the world through categories, not the universal structure of the individual mind. Nor are social cognitions limited to metaphysics and the function of representation. As speech-act theory has driven into the 20<sup>th</sup> century noggin, there are multiple types of shared cognitions with various functions beyond factual description, many of them offering blueprints for intersubjective interactions. If they follow the conventional script, utterances have performative effects, from persuading other people of one's rightness to telling other people what to do. Social cognitions thus include complex rules for making successful performances in the activity of apologizing or negotiating as well as describing.

Some schemata have a dynamic, adaptive relationship with the world and are the condition of the possibility of experiential learning. Others are further removed from such physical hook-ups and assert the existence of spiritual ancestors, witches, heaven and hell, or deep interior spaces of the self. All schemata though are information-processing mechanisms, interpreting new experiences in the light of old cognitions (DiMaggio 1997). Kant understood this point well before the birth of cognitive psychology and its "information processing mechanisms." He rightly speculated the exercise of cognitive schemata in the human imagination's ability to synthesize and reproduce the lived world according to already established categories.

Enough about Kant and cognition. The important points here are that cognitions are social, somewhat external, and manifest most clearly in action, interaction, and communication, all of which are made possible by them. Cognitions are shared schemata, having a wide variety

of world-constitutive functions. And when pushed together by history and community to make a meaningful world, they are called discourse.

Switching gears now to the other basic category at stake, affect and theories of affect are currently having a renaissance in the social sciences. Increased attention to affect is occurring at the cutting edge of many schools of sociological theory and research in a way that is very exciting but also fraught with eclecticism and little consensus. While I agree that there is an ‘affective turn’ occurring across the social sciences, along with a new trans-disciplinary spirit, it is still only arriving at the first bend in the turn and enjoys nowhere as near as much prestige and legitimacy as cultural theory or the prior ‘cultural turn’ of social theory, perhaps due to its newness and relative under-development. The sociology of emotions is but one part of this developing story in the academic ascendancy of affect. Sociologists of emotion typically promote a strong constructionist perspective on affects, which has been influential but not completely persuasive to some other social theorists of affect, such as poststructuralists and psychoanalysts. I discuss Arlie Hochschild’s sociology of emotions in much more depth in my next section, but here I want to clarify the difference between affect and emotion.

Affect includes emotions but also many other things. Many affects have an essential cognitive component, as sociologists of emotions have asserted for decades now. Emotions like pride or jealousy would not exist and could not be experienced without the contextual activation of social cognitions, such as feeling rules and emotion labels. But it is doubtful that the nature of affect itself is purely cognitive. James Jasper (1998), a sociologist of the emotions in social movements and collective action, distinguishes between specific, interactive emotional experiences and a wider range of affects, like mood, trust and attachments. He writes, “Most constructionists focus on emotions that represent temporary responses to events and

information...But emotions also cover more permanent feelings of the type normally labeled affect or sentiment: love for one's family and other selected individuals; a sense of identification with a group and loyalty to its members; fondness for places and objects, perhaps based on memories; positive responses to symbols of various kinds; and negative versions of each of these" (1998:401-42). Chronic collective moods, for instance, are included in this wider company of affects.

As I will show, mood is an important type of affect because it reveals the detachability and dimensional difference between affect and cognition. Mood feelings do not have a direct object and are felt even without the prior activation of cognitive feeling rules or emotion labeling. This lack of cognition is essential to the experience of moods, for once they are actually identified, and causes found, they usually dissipate. However, the unconscious experience of a collective mood, as well as of an individual mood for that matter, has powerful cognitive-perceptual effects.

Cognition, while essential to some affective experiences, is not the primary constituent or medium of affect, pace the presuppositions of a strong constructionist account. What then is affect? How can some affective experiences be both unconscious and collective? Questions like these have led me to consider a more psychoanalytic approach to affect for its attention to bodily and psychic processes. Affects are *experienced*, they are felt by bodies. All affects, whether specific situational emotions or chronic moods, have this corporeal element, belonging to a dimension altogether different from cognition. Cognition and affect are two inseparable modes of social life, but only once their difference is appreciated does it make sense to talk about the concrete intersections between them.

There is no simple psychoanalytic theory of affect. Psychoanalysis implicitly theorizes affect all the time through concepts like fantasy, cathexis, instincts, repression, anxiety, idealization, narcissism, humor, transference, etc. All of these concepts refer to affective experiences in some way. Freud thought that the interpretation of affects, by situating them next to their unconscious causes, was central to the therapeutic process. Clearly this is not the paper to systematize psychoanalytic theories of affect; such a project has already been accomplished (Spezzano 1993; Green 1999). Instead of expounding basic concepts of psychoanalysis then, I will discuss what Freud thought about affect in general.

Freud changed his mind concerning affect a few times throughout his life. My reading of him is very selective. I think that *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud 1965), though not concentrating on affect, is the most useful resource for cultural theorists wanting to incorporate affective bodies and psyches into their social analysis. In that book, mental representations and chains of thought are entangled with dynamic psychic-affective processes. Here Freud deploys both a theory of cathexis, the attachment of desire to a psychic object, and a philosophy of mind to explain dream processes and neurosis. This is the Freud of 1899, writing in between his early economic models of the psyche—on the mental circulation or damming up of instinctual energy—and his 1915 metapsychological papers, thus, long before Freud's naturalization of the Western subject in ego psychology.

Freud understands affect as a type of psychic energy that has both quantitative and qualitative sides to it. Quantitatively, affect originates from the body in overloads of excitation or instinctual energy. His stress is on the varying amount of affect, especially as it fluctuates due to repression (repression increases affective intensity by preventing it from “discharge”). The affective dimension must be measured in terms of quantitative magnitude in addition to

qualitative content. Freud uses an array of psychological terms to get at affect's sensation within the body—'pressure,' 'cathectic energy,' 'instinctual force,' and even the economic sounding 'quota of affect.'<sup>3</sup>

In their well-received psychoanalytic dictionary, Laplanche and Pontalis note that, for Freud, "affect is the qualitative expression of the quantity of instinctual energy and of its fluctuations" (1973:13).<sup>4</sup> Sociologists of emotion will most likely find Freud's physicalist and scientific terms troubling, as do I, but one can appreciate his economic model of psyche *metaphorically*,<sup>5</sup> the main import being the dependence of affect upon physiological arousal. Affect involves the movements of the body felt by the body expressed in one's bodily exterior. Of course, arousal is a libidinal term for Freud the sexologist: levels of affective intensity depend upon socially demanded sexual repression in the theory of dreams. I however prefer a broader non-sexual understanding of affective arousal, qua bodily sensations that I see as fundamental to all emotional experiences, anxious or otherwise.

Affect is deeply corporeal and yet it can also become attached to ideas or mental representations. The main utility of *The Interpretation of Dreams* for cultural theorists is this idea of the separability and attachability of cognitions and affects. Psychic-affective intensity becomes mobile when mental "primary processes" like condensation and displacement move an affective charge along ideational chains of association. Repressing a highly charged idea, the unconscious can displace the affect originally associated with that idea and can re-connect it to an otherwise trivial detail of one's day, hence the vividness of certain details while dreaming. I

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<sup>3</sup> This passage is exemplary: "I mean the conception that among the psychic functions there is something which should be differentiated (an amount of affect, a sum of excitation), something having all the attributes of a quantity—although we possess no means of measuring it—a something which is capable of increase, decrease, displacement, and discharge, and which extends itself over the memory traces of an idea like an electric charge over the surface of the body" (Freud 1946 [1894]: 75).

<sup>4</sup> Today the relevant naturalistic terms are neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin

<sup>5</sup> As Freud himself did, as Jose Brunner argues (Brunner 2002).

would wager that this is actually the fundamental type of cathexis in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, the affective cathexis of *ideas*. Affects are modifiable and displaceable, yet wherever they go, whatever new thought they become associated with, the resultant cognitive-affective linkage produces some form of bodily arousal.

The detachability and re-attachability of affects to cognitions is crucial, for instance, to any theory of mood. Moods are unconscious affects induced by events and cultures, but the actual experience of a mood lingers on even after the mood-inducing events have passed. What I propose to do in this essay is to re-theorize discourse and elements of discourse through a social psychoanalytic theory of cathexis. Specifically, my aim is to explain the affective cathexis of social cognition as this occurs in values, collective moods, and symbolic boundaries. All three discursive phenomena reveal the inter-linking of cognition and affect. The process of inter-linking, however, does not occur within the individual unconscious brain, contra Freudian dream theory. It is a social process and occurs within the culture of bodies, in which affective attachments are culturally outlined and prefigured.<sup>6</sup>

As the reader should realize, my psychoanalytic theorizing does not remain loyal to Freud, and from this point on he becomes a footnote. Ultimately the classical psychoanalytic theory positing affect to be the product of intra-psychic conflict is unsatisfactory for restricting affective intensity to repressive contexts. But within the wider psychoanalytic tradition, there are further theoretical tools for moving beyond the classical scene of instinctual repression. Mood, values and boundaries are all different kinds of *fantasies*, as theorized by later relational psychoanalysts Melanie Klein and Nancy Chodorow. Fantasies consist of “affect-laden images” which unconsciously structure intersubjective interactions (Chodorow 1999:15). Fantasies are a

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<sup>6</sup> Or to be more precise, shared affective attachments to cognitions are deployed according to the schematizing functions of discourse. This does not make affect any less bodily, nor does it give up the possibility of *unconscious* affective work, including collective mood par excellence.

cognitive-affective experience, in which ideas and perceptions enter a nexus of affective attachments. According to psychoanalytic *social theory*, humans wake up each and every day to the fantasy world of their subjectivity constructed by cognitive-affective linkages.

## II. Origins of a General Theory

Cognitive-affective linkages refer to a messy *hybrid* of cultural, psychological and bodily dimensions.<sup>7</sup> While they can be found in the common situational presence of emotions, well theorized by the interactionist tradition in sociology, I want to explore the wider corporeal, relational flows of discursive affects. Sociologists presuppose such cognitive-affective linkages when they theorize collective sentiments (Durkheim 1995), feelings of national pride and ethnic attachments (Anderson 1991), or the shared generational mood felt in a particular time and place (Williams 1977). In this section I hope to outline a general theory of cognitive-affective hybrids and to see what disparate species of social things it re-classifies under the same genus.

Both sociologists of emotions and cultural sociologists already recognize the existence and significance of intersections between cognition and affect. Sociologists, as noted, consider shared cognitions to be an essential condition of emotional experiences. Affect-related cognitions, as in the labeling of emotions, are socially constructed and situationally activated. The emotions felt by an individual depend upon cultural representations, i.e. of the appropriateness of certain feelings relative to the definition of the situation.

Arlie Hochschild's seminal studies of emotion work and labor observe the gap between what one feels, what one *thinks* one should feel, and the feeling this disjuncture produces (Hochschild 1979; 1983; 1990; 2003). Emotion work involves efforts to bridge the gap between one's feelings and the emotional norms of the situation that one finds oneself within. Emotion

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<sup>7</sup> C.f. Rom Harre's (2009) theory of emotions as cognitive-affective-somatic *hybrids*.



self-management always takes place in relation to a particular set of normative “feeling rules,” constituting a community’s emotion culture. The standard sociological definition of emotion, following Hochschild, recognizes the complex interconnection between sensations (affective arousal), representations (cognitive understandings), and rules or norms for gestural display (situational expectations) that enable the feeling of even basic emotions.

Emotions are thus one species of cognitive-affective hybrid, involving perceptual, evaluative and physiological elements. This insight into the intersection of cognition and affect can be found in many branches of the sociology of emotion in addition to Hochschild’s theory of emotion work. Affect control theory explicitly makes “semantic differentials”—the coding of objects and situations according to goodness, potency, and activity—a core feature of emotional reactions (Heise 1979). In his theory of interaction ritual chains, Randall Collins (2004) emphasizes the storing of emotional energy in cognitive form, expectations between rituals on the chain.

Awareness of cognitive-affective linkages then is nothing new to some extent. However, there are certain biases in the sociology of emotions preventing a more comprehensive general theory of them. As so defined, emotions are only one species of discursive affects and one with certain peculiarities that cannot be generalized onto the wide variety of affective experiences in social life. Emotions are, mostly, experienced *by individuals* for the above theorists. This indicates a problem though. Collective emotions are not as amenable to a *micro* situational analysis as is an individual’s anger, sadness, jealousy or disgust.<sup>8</sup>

The sociology of emotions universalizes a particular individualism that forecloses a wider analysis of cultural affects. As Hochschild was well aware (1979), Goffman’s emotion *manager*,

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<sup>8</sup> The classical theory of collective emotions is reconsidered in Mustafa Emirbayer’s (1996) paper defending Durkheim to historical sociologists.

capable of ironic distance from the self, is conditioned by Western, modern cultural representations of the individual. Hochschild seemingly wants to press against the limits of this paradigm. In the years between *The Managed Heart* (1983) and *The Second Shift* (2003 [1989]), she shifts research questions from how we do emotion work according to “feeling rules” to how such *emotional cultures relate to culture at large*, such as gender ideologies with valuations of traditional or egalitarian domestic roles. This is a self-described revision: Hochschild writes about her realization that there can be second-order feelings about ‘feeling rules’ themselves.<sup>9</sup> Culture in general is saturated with intense feelings about norms and values, including evaluative judgments about emotional norms. These are normative feelings toward certain feeling expectations, e.g. acceptance or protest toward the idea that the housewife *should* repress feelings of anger (as studied in *The Second Shift*).

There are actually several different social things at stake here, all being species of cognitive-affective linkages: emotions, values and identities. Hochschild’s corpus provides an analytic segue from the study of the former to the latter two. For instance, she describes how ideology and values are affective objects in themselves, functioning as the “emotional anchor” of gender representations. She also discusses the psychodynamic work—we could call it—of revising personal emotional strategies in order to live up to a gendered person-archetype, e.g. the “super-mom” who can do the second shift by suppressing feelings of resentment. Two new species of cognitive-affective linkages emerge in this discussion: the affective attachment to cultural values and the psychodynamics of identification with fantasy characters. Both are kinds of discursive affects not reducible to the category of ‘emotion’ as previously defined. Rather, let us follow a line of thought leading from a *cognition-in-emotion perspective*, a la the sociology of

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<sup>9</sup> “I had to revise my earlier model, according to which feeling rules were something that governed feelings, and were not themselves the object of feelings....in the case of passionate or ambivalent ideologies, I had to stop to explore what lay behind feeling rules” (Hochschild 1990:127).

emotions, to an *affect-in-culture perspective*. The main weakness of the cognition-in-emotion perspective is that it tends to foreclose consideration of a wider affective economy within culture, the latter being evident in aforementioned hybrids like cultural and national values, mood and other collective emotions, fantasies of identity relying upon symbolic boundaries, etc. An affect-in-culture perspective frames these hybrids through a general theory of cognitive-affective linkages and their role in historical discursive formations.

An ontology of diverse cognitive-affective linkages emerges from sociological research into the historical contingency of Western, individualist conceptions of personhood. If the individuation of the subject is historically specific,<sup>10</sup> then one is led to think of the discursive formations promoting individualism as themselves being psychically charged, supra-individual cognitions. Early Foucault (2006), for instance, interrogated the discursive formations of ‘madness.’ He saw that modern psychiatric experiences of mental illness originated in the Classical Age’s othering and Reason’s taming of its categorical opposite through the “great confinement.” From Foucault I also derive the notion of *discursive affect*, a term I use to stress the non-dualistic embeddedness of affect in culture and material technology.

Judith Butler (1997) has more recently reintroduced Foucauldian historicism and Freudian psychoanalysis to each other—not the pure antagonists that they are often thought to be—producing a theory of the “affective attachments” necessary for any identity performance. In Foucauldian-Butlerian poststructuralism, there is no pre-given individual preceding discursive power and the affective attachments animating the body. The sociology of emotions, in contrast, mostly brackets out the historical-discursive formation of the subject, including the social construction of the emotion manager.

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<sup>10</sup> See Castoriadis 1987, Taylor 1989, and Foucault 1995 on the social construction of the individual.

Foucault and Butler are two excellent muses for thinking through bodily affects beyond the individual. If affects do not exist except in bodies, cognitive-affective linkages demands a theoretical framework for thinking through bodies in the multiple, *the bodily*, as opposed to the (Western, individualistic) body. This is precisely what Foucault and Butler excel at doing. They give social science an understanding of discourse, power, and affect as constitutive of bodily performances, and a theory of how discursive cognitions and affects give bodies the appearance of individual subjectivity.

What is a ‘discursive affect’ as I am using the term? It is a class of cognitive-affective linkages shaped by discursive formations yet felt by bodies. They are socially shared—often diffusely so—and simultaneously corporeal, psychosomatic experiences. They are semiotic, being based on particular significations that make up symbol systems or representations in the cultural system.<sup>11</sup> Yet they also refer to a dimension of the cultural imagination largely neglected by cultural sociologists as well, except those experimenting with a psychodynamic perspective (for instance, Alexander 2006; also Castoriadis 1987). The concept attempts to fuse cultural semantics with a psychosomatic dimension of the bodily.

The theory of discursive affects bridges the textual order of culture with the experienced pleasures and pains of people (Barthes 1975). Another term for it could be ‘cultural experience’ with an emphasis on our embodied relationship to symbols as cathected or reviled objects. Discursive affects are the site at which cultural and psychological dimensions of social life converge in the form of shared social imaginaries, in the production of fantasies of the desirable or the feared. Symbol systems can be read cognitively, but they can also be measured in terms of

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<sup>11</sup> Structuralism asserted that symbols never stand alone, but their relation to each other is also influenced by an affective economy of attraction or repulsion (Lacan 2006). Nor is any symbolic object purely read—it is also loved or hated, or both ambivalently, or associated with contemplative disinterest, a rather unique affective economy in itself.

their experiential magnitude, the level of affective intensity or indifference. Thus, the study of discursive affects requires both a *hermeneutical and a psychodynamic inquiry*.<sup>12</sup>

The analysis of the intersection of cognition and affect could be applied to other topics in sociology as well, such as collective memory, sexuality and desire, social movements and transformative events. Take the notion of ‘events’ as defined by William Sewell (1996) and others proposing a temporally sensitive eventful sociology. Sewell recognizes that *cultural meanings and collective emotions* are both essential conditions for the unfolding of a transformation in enduring structures. The very make-up of an event, as Sewell conceives of it, is partly cognitive and partly affective. Flows of affect can serve to make rhetoric and ideas spread faster and be more effective than they would otherwise be, facilitating the unfolding sequence of transformative collective action. In addition to values, mood, and symbolic boundaries then, eventual cognitive-affective linkages deserve much more future research.

### **III. Values**

Contemporary sociology has not bestowed upon values the epistemic legitimacy they once held as an area of inquiry. Values were central to Talcott Parsons’s grand synthesis of utilitarianism and normativism into a general theory of action. Parsons defined values as conceptions of the desirable, operating as invisible instigators of action. With his colleagues in anthropology, societies were analyzed and compared according to the core values they expressed. Values were thought to be the organizing principles of social life. In sociological theory, values were the prime mover in explanations of action, motivation, and theories of socialization. Before I turn to the project of crafting a new theory of values, as cognitive-affective linkages in the social order of culture—and not as psychological action implants—I

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<sup>12</sup> The idea of an *affective hermeneutics* for this purpose is expanded in my section on mood below.

will show why values have fallen into disgrace in sociology, but also why many contemporary theorists are recently reconsidering their place.

In the fifties and sixties, critical sociologists questioned the supposed power of these cultural entities and the integrative function they served within Parsonian action theory. Since values are putatively invisible, perhaps this suggests that the social scientist is assuming, deductively and abstractly, their deep existence without adequate empirical inference, instead committing the logical fallacy of misattribution in value-based explanations of action (Spates 1982 summarizes this line of criticism). After all, values may be *post hoc* rationalizations of self-interested action.

Then in 1986, Ann Swidler published her to-be-highly-cited article criticizing the presuppositions and implications of the “values paradigm” in sociological thought. Swidler identified several assumptions made, from Weber to Parsons, when defining culture primarily as values. Appropriating newer and textually thicker theories of culture, she could dismiss this as a type of cultural essentialism: culture *qua* abstract values. The values paradigm was also strongly determinist in its explanations of action. The “unit-act” in prior sociological theory, as Swidler called it, was mechanically made up of means and ends, the latter deciding the course of action. In the unit-act, values provided the normative ground, the *telos*, explaining human behavior like ‘switchmen’ determine the train track.

Swidler’s pragmatic-hermeneutic cultural theory eliminated the notion of values as invisible, internalized implants governing action. Instead, culture is conceptualized as bits and pieces of information, skills and know-how’s, that a culture-user can select according to

circumstantial demands. In some situations, culture may be an effective constraint upon action, but more frequently, culture is used as a *post-hoc* justification of situational conduct.<sup>13</sup>

With a pragmatic approach to values, as opposed to a deductive-functionalist one, a realistic appraisal could be made about the role of values in social life, no doubt including a reduction in their importance. However, many contemporary sociologists are proposing a more viable theory of values that moves beyond the cultural essentialism and normative determinism of the former values paradigm. The return of values in sociological theory can be seen in a rapidly expanding literature about them (Joas 2000, Alexander 2003, Bender 2003, Hitlin 2004, Gecas 2008, Szomptka 2009, Vaisey 2009).

This new wave of theory stresses the mediation of the effect of values through situations, confirming Swidler's basic argument. It emphasizes the ambivalent, fragmented nature of values, *i.e.* values do not crystallize into a coherent, discrete cultural wholes. Rather, contradictory valuations co-exist within the same culture without agents necessarily finding the inconsistency to be problematic (Thomson 2010). Values are one possible component of culture among many and sociological theory needs to take into account both the motivational and justificatory usages of culture (according to Stephen Vaisey's dual-process model of culture, Vaisey 2009). With a distinctive style of structuralist hermeneutics, Jeffrey Alexander (2003) reconstructs values as binary oppositions between the good and the evil (or the pure v. the polluted). He argues that shared evaluative judgments of the good only emerge relationally from a conceptual system of antagonisms. Values are only meaningful and effective in relation to their classificatory opposite, the wicked and the wrong, hence Alexander's neologism "antivalues" to capture the force of evil in a culture (Alexander 2003). Alexander also foregrounds the *affective experience* of both values

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<sup>13</sup> Swidler's argument was later echoed by the German social theorist, Hans Joas (1996) who continued to criticize the rationalist teleology—the *a priori* means-ends schema—in Parsonian action theory. Ironically, Parsons proposed his general theory as a normativist rejection of rational action models in sociology.

and antivalues. The new wave of value theory pays much more attention to the affective dimension of discourse.

Why the resurgence of interest in values? One reason may be that the study of values offers an empirical-theoretical site to think beyond the cognitive bias in cultural theory, hermeneutic, pragmatic or otherwise. Values have essential cognitive *and affective* social components. Without the psychic and corporeal experience of emotional attachment to the good or revulsion toward moral threats, values would not be values. Both Charles Taylor (1989) and Hans Joas (2000) conceptualize values as emerging from an affective experience of something qualitatively different from routine experience. Values involve some sort of psychic charge or emotional intensity circulating around the social body.

As social theorists increasingly challenge the cognitive bias derived from linguistic structuralism and hermeneutics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they start to appreciate the affective dimension of culture more, often with the aid of psychoanalytic theory. More cultural theorists are adding an affective dimension to their discourse analysis, for instance the notion of cathexis in cultural sociology (Alexander 2006) and the notion of ambivalence and disavowal in postcolonial social theory (Bhabha 2007). I propose that any future theory of values must make explicit their affective structure, their situationality, but also their dark side, i.e. how they are frequently invoked to justify violence or make sense of inequality.<sup>14</sup>

Values are a type of discursive affect. They emerge within a relational, conceptual space carved out by discursive formations. Even the stale Parsonian concept of a “value-orientation” understood that values are inherently relational. A value belongs to a more complex web of inter-

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<sup>14</sup> The theory I’m advancing applies to cultural values and not economic value. In economics, value refers to the worth of a commodity in market exchanges; this sort of value can be quantified. Cultural values, on the other hand, are not quantifiable; they typically refer to the moral worth of some common good as identified by a community. On the other hand, cultural values often determine the economic worth of something, as when it is sentimentalized (Zelizer 1985).



related values—that’s what a value-*orientation* is. Parsons’s formulation of “conceptions of the desirable” is worth retaining, but must be supplemented with recognition of the related conceptions of the feared or the morally threatening. Furthermore, values are more than mere conceptions; the very *desirability* of values indicates a peculiar discursive-psychic nexus of feeling. Values are a point of intersection between cognitive and affective dimensions.

Consider for instance the relationship between values and violence, a frequent collusion most critically examined by postmodern and poststructural social theory. Why is it that the prototypical image we have of persons acting according to their values, rather than their self-interests, is going to war? In war and terrorism, values motivate people to voluntarily sacrifice life for social causes largely unknown to them (Gecas 2008). The connection between values and violence is central to Jacques Derrida’s theory of centering and deconstruction (Derrida 1997). Deconstruction is a method of exposing how privileged interpretations or consensual values exclude difference. Poststructuralists like Lacan and Derrida write about values in a very different language than most American sociologists, but the latter can appreciate their insight into subtle forms of power. Both Derrida’s ‘centers’ and Lacan’s ‘master signifiers’ (Lacan 2006) deal with special nodes of discursive relations that motivate social agents through an imaginary wholeness or closure they desire. Such discursive centers, cognitively and affectively maintained, cannot be considered in isolation from the marginalization of differences.<sup>15</sup>

Values are not limited to the affectively charged call to arms though. As more recent value theory suggests, the effect of values upon human action varies according to context. In some contexts like war, values may transcend immediate needs and self-interests, but in other situations, values quickly take a backseat to other practical concerns (of course, this is true of

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<sup>15</sup> In American sociology, the cognitive-affective relationship between values and power can likewise be grasped by the theory of symbolic boundaries (Section V). Values and value-conflicts can become the symbolic basis of distinction between in-groups and out-groups, and they can motivate efforts to enforce these boundaries socially.

actual war experiences in many cases too). Recent empirical research has called into question how effective the moral pull of values really is. Some sociologists have persuasively argued that values are usually motivationally weak (Winchester and Hitlin 2010; Thomson 2010; Bender 2003). Sociological theory must take into account the weakness, or situational dependence, of values without abandoning the study of them altogether. To summarize in terms of intellectual traditions here, understanding values requires cultural sociology to learn from psychoanalysis on the varying affective intensity of cognition and pragmatism on the situationality of all action. Briefly, I offer three meta-theoretical theses to move the sociology of values forward.

*1) Values are affectively unique and tend to be weak unless they are institutionalized.*

People often decide to betray their values due to group conformity and expected social consequences, e.g. obeying an authority figure despite one's moral disagreement with the specific order at hand. In such cases, values are trumped by other situational norms. Winchester and Hitlin (2010) claim that the famous 1963 Milgram experiment in obedience and cruelty offers evidence of the weakness of values *when they conflict with norms*. This sobering experiment demonstrated that many pain-averse democratic citizens are willing to be cruel if the situation demands it. It also provides an instance wherein values and norms conflict with each other, which is not necessarily the case as when values have been institutionalized into rules and expectations.

While norms and values may seem similar in their moral pull or push upon action, they are very different social things. In sociological theory, norms usually denote rules that tell an agent how to act appropriately at a particular time and venue. Norms are more specific and situational than values. Many norms sanctioned by social groups have no relation to values, such

as what colors to wear or what time to show up or how to say goodbye. Values, in contrast, are “trans-situational” (Schwartz 1994). They stay the same across different times and situations. A person can apply a value to many different situations, depending upon their practical reasoning (i.e. *phronesis*); the resultant actions are often very different thanks to the interpretive flexibility of values. Norms operate more in the manner of ‘do this’ ‘don’t do that’ depending on who one is with and where one is. In this sense, values are simpler than norms; values don’t have as many rules, clauses and qualifications. Values are simpler and more *abstract*, requiring situational mediation to determine which conduct best expresses the evaluative judgment, if other pressures don’t intervene. Values require translation into action, which can occur either in a conscious deliberative way or in a more unconscious way too (Vaisey 2009).

The lived experience of norms and values also have affective differences. Norms trigger immediate, external consequences if you violate them, unlike the consequences of being indifferent to values. Norms probably require social sanctions to be effective, whereas values are effective because of how an individual *experiences* them. Values produce powerful feelings and a psychic-affective reaction that motivates an agent to a decision-making not based on the situational pressure to conform or the utilitarian rationale of avoiding bad consequences. A social theory of values requires hermeneutic and phenomenological sensitivity to the affective experience of something sacred or evil.

However, the relationship between values and norms gets complex because values can be institutionalized into norms. In his *Three Society* study, psychological anthropologist Roy D’Andrade (2008) argues that values have the most effective influence upon cross-national cultural character and societal action when they are institutionalized. Institutionalized values are not optional like personal values are and they may indeed have external consequences if they are

violated, because they have come to overlap with norms, roles and obligations. Values are more likely to be strong, enduring and motivationally relevant if they become institutionalized into civil society, government, family, etc. Studies in institutional isomorphism have made a similar argument, though Powell and DiMaggio (1983) prefer the language of ‘logics’ rather than ‘values,’ and perhaps rightfully so because in institutionalization, the distinctive affective experience of values may be evacuated from organizational contexts.

*2) The influence of values is mediated by interpretive agency and other social constraints.*

Many examples could be provided of times when people with very different values engage in the exact same moral and political behavior. People with radically different value-orientations can vote for the same presidential candidate, for instance, for different reasons. Pace Parsons and the values paradigm, this implies that values cannot explain everything, namely why people with different values would do the same thing. Sociologist Courtney Bender (2003) observes this fact from her ethnography of volunteers working in a non-profit kitchen devoted to cooking home-delivered meals for persons with AIDS. She found out that some of the volunteers were religious and religiously motivated in their reasons for volunteering, and some were secular, appealing to non-religious humanist values. Yet, religious and secular minded volunteers shared the same moral goals, namely, charity and getting the meals out on time.

Values are only loosely related to behavior—action does not automatically follow from holding certain values. The inverse is also true: people with the same values can have very different moral behaviors. Two social agents sharing the same Puritan hard-working values may have different attitudes toward unemployment and thus different feelings when they lose their

job. Some may blame the individual as part of a moral panic toward the unemployed poor; others may identify the lack of economic opportunities and perceive a wider tragedy of talent going to waste. The same value is interpreted in two different ways, and can lead to different courses of action. This fact has led Thomson (2010) to describe the “loose connection” or a “loose coupling” between culture and action. Cultural values have to be interpreted by actors and thus their effect on action is always mediated by a host of other social things.

3) *Values emerge from discursive relations that can be contradictory and ambivalent.*

The social sciences have periodically proposed that humans are rational and coherent beings when it comes to managing their values and making decisions based on their values, a view certainly encouraged by economics but also by Weberian hermeneutics and rational choice theory. From these schools of theory, sociologists still today assume that social agents will try to avoid cognitive dissonance by either changing their beliefs to fit their actions or changing their actions to fit their beliefs. It turns out, however, that people can believe and do contradictory things without feeling any cognitive dissonance whatsoever. The same is true with values: values that are logically incompatible with each other, between tradition and openness-to-change, or between independence and conformism, can be held and strategically managed by the same individual (Swidler 1986). Social agents are capable of retaining two ‘incompatible’ values by selecting which value to activate and when according to the situation. Similarly, values can be *ambivalent* when an agent possess two contradictory attitudes toward a value simultaneously due to wider discursive relations.<sup>16</sup> For example, self-reliant individualism may be a prime value in a

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<sup>16</sup> Ambivalence, in psychoanalysis, described transference relationships in which both love and hatred are intensely felt at the same time.

discursive formation that simultaneously denigrates “excessive” individualism, too much of it being a bad thing (Thomson 2010).

Recent research makes a compelling case for not overestimating the strength of values and for the theory that values are only “loosely connected” to action and behavior. Maybe the weakness of values is relatively new to individualistic societies, an argument made by Robert Bellah and his colleagues (1985). Or maybe values were never really that strong, always being mediated by situations tempering their affective force or, in some cases, preventing the escalation of value conflicts into violence. Either way, the science of values is evolving to do justice to their distinctive cognitive and affective dimensions. Values were once thought to govern societies and dictate how people lived, but as the concept of culture shifted from an Essence to a Text in the social sciences, so values became understood as one kind of cognitive-affective linkage participating in and delimited by a complex discursive-social order.

#### **IV. Mood**

Mood is a distinctive kind of affect, contrastable to emotions. Psychology has long tried to explicate the nature of mood ever since Edith Jacobsen and Sylvan Tomkins. Psychological theory and current social psychology distinguish between mood and emotions on the basis of the former’s ambiguity and diffuseness. Emotions are situational feeling-dispositions toward specific objects or interlocutors and the cause of the feeling is often clear. An emotion like ‘anger’ at *x* differs from a more diffuse mood of ‘irritability.’ The precipitating events that give rise to a mood are often unknown and not cognitively identifiable by the affected person.

Several psychologists claim that mood is a state of feeling disconnected from an individual’s usage of emotion labeling (Morris 1989; Siemer 2009). In their “arousal plus

cognition” theory of emotions, mood exists as a primitive activation of the affective system of arousal without consciousness of the feeling. The cognitive system remains inactivated. If this would seem to imply a natural neurological separation of cognition and affect, the psychology of mood instead goes on to observe how the affective state of moods can shape perceptions of the external world in a totalizing way. Moods are “global,” meaning they have a psychological pervasive quality influencing perception, memory, and decisions—virtually one’s entire relationship with the object-world.

The concept of mood as temporary, totalizing feeling-states has some affinity with the sociology of collective emotions from Durkheim to Jaspers. Psychologists of mood though wrongly neglected the possibility of this socially shared experiential component since they focused more on the individual experience of mood, mood-swings and mood-enhancing drugs. The dominance of the “arousal plus cognition” paradigm in the theory of mood also falsely separated affect and cognition in regards to the genesis of the mood, because it considers “mood-precipitating events” to be exogenous to affective experience (Morris 1989). When these events are excluded from the theory of mood, it is easier to think of mood as just some pure abstract state of arousal without character. Although mood indeed has an unconscious or *automatic* character in response to events—unidentified by the agent—the cognitive constitution of these mood-inducing events is highly relevant to the affective character of the actual mood experience.<sup>17</sup>

The cognitive component of mood stems directly from the historical, temporal events that unknowingly cause it, whether on a daily or epochal plane. But ‘events’ themselves are culturally and affectively constituted. Thus, the arousal of mood has cultural contours relative to a certain

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<sup>17</sup> Paul DiMaggio distinguishes between automatic and deliberate cognitions in his essay, “Culture and Cognition” (1997).

place and time, much like the concept of ‘structure of feeling’ implies for British cultural studies (Williams 1977). The relationship between mood and culture is developed further in the symbolic anthropology of Clifford Geertz. Geertz inherited an existential psychology of mood from his philosophical reading, particularly from writings of Gilbert Ryle (1949) and Martin Heidegger (1962, 1996) before him. The state of mood research today does not offer the empirical wealth that the new sociology of values did above. For this reason, I spend more time examining theoretical precedents before offering a few theses advancing the study of collective mood.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) is not typically seen as a theorist of affect. Yet, if we are willing to accept that human life is saturated with affects, periodically and chronically, and if ‘thick description’ involves hovering close to the ethnographic context, then it is not surprising that Geertz would frequently observe collective emotions or mood even while he unraveled the conceptual logic of symbol systems. Consider his appreciation for the subtleties of affective valences across diverse cultures:

The endurance, courage, independence, perseverance, and passionate willfulness in which the vision quest practices the Plains Indian are the same flamboyant virtues by which he attempts to life...The consciousness of defaulted obligation, secreted guilt, and, when a confession is obtained, public shame in which Manus’ séance rehearses him are the same sentiments that underlie the sort of duty ethic by which his property-conscious society is maintained...And the same self-discipline which rewards a Javanese mystic staring fixedly into the flame of a lamp with what he takes to be an intimation of divinity drills him in that rigorous control of emotional expression which is necessary to a man who would follow a quietistic style of life (95).

In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, the best discussion of discursive affects, including the passage above, can be found in his essays on religion, especially the well-circulated “Religion As a Cultural System,” in which he approaches religion as a symbol system that welds together an *ethos* with a worldview.



Every religion has two dimensions for Geertz, a cosmic framework and a *moral-aesthetic-affective ethos*. Religion excels at fusing together metaphysics with a set of powerful feelings: “sacred symbols function to synthesize a people’s ethos—the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood—and their worldview—the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are” (89). Emotions like humble reverence or divine hatred belong to the ethos or mood of a religious culture. While Geertz claims that the “symbolic fusion of ethos and world view” is most effectively accomplished through religion and its communal-ceremonial rituals, he recognizes that this fusion can be seen elsewhere too. He identifies a secular collective mood in the worry felt during “the hanging threat of nuclear holocaust” (98).

For Geertz, mood is an emotional fog or climate relative to specific cultures. It primarily varies by the intensity of feeling, coming and going “for often quite unfathomable reasons” (97). Induced by symbol systems, moods are the shared affects present in different cultural orders, each of which is a constellation of feelings like shame, tranquility, melancholy or exuberance. Geertz champions the cultural relativity and diversity of collective moods, the number of which is, like its attached metaphysical conceptions, limitless in principle.<sup>18</sup> The relativity and specificity of mood provides a rationale for studying the interconnections between culture and affect rather than for the classification of a few fundamental emotions in isolation from their historically conditioned background meanings as some psychologists would have it.

Moods are “like fogs, they just settle and lift” (97), Geertz continues the climate analogy, a set of advantageous metaphors because it “gets [psychological forces] out of any dim and

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<sup>18</sup> Instead of offering a universal classification of possible emotions, Geertz emphasizes the “thoroughly singular figurations of fear and gaiety” in the Balinese ritual (122) and that “the sorts of moods and motivations which characterize a man who has just come from an Aztec human sacrifice are rather different from those of one who has just put off his Kachina mask” (123).

inaccessible realm of private sensation into that same well-lit world of observables in reside the brittleness of glass...and, to return to the metaphor, *the dampness of England*" (96, *emphasis mine*). To define moods, Geertz achieves representational transparency only through great figural wit. Moods are "like scents, suffuse and evaporate" he goes on, and throughout the essay, he expands the metaphor supplementing it with music motifs as well: words like tone, tenor, and tuning enable him, if nothing else, to point to the affective dimension within the semiotic.

Geertz writes that motivation is "vectoral," whereas mood is "scalar" (97). Though affectively experienced, *motivations* are purposive dispositions in Geertz's account, involving a liability to act with certain feelings in certain situations toward certain ends. *Mood* though has to be interpreted differently, namely "with reference to the conditions from which they are conceived to spring" as opposed to interpretation through teleological-rational intelligibility. "We interpret moods in terms of their sources" (97). Hence a reverential worshipful mood can spring from divine encounters; an anxious mood of worry can stem from the mass-media amplified apocalypse—the affective character of moods springs from the cultural constitution of events. Moods are always culturally specific, being induced by the logic of symbol systems.

One of the main attributes of a mood for Geertz is its variable intensity. A specific mood, whether euphoric or fearful, can become so strong that it totally transforms one's experience and attitude toward the world. Mood adds a scalar quality of magnitude to the semiotic analysis of culture: symbols can be experienced *more powerfully* through the affective mechanism of mood. In observing and analyzing culturally specific moods, we enter an alternative theoretical language-game not reducible to semiotics, and this fact might account for some of Geertz's figural complexity. Geertz seems to be adding a dimension of *meaningfulness* to his usual analysis of meaning. While moods are semantically circumscribed, they add another dimension

internal to textual semantics, i.e. a level of psychological intensity or a heightening of experience. Moods operate like the everyday equivalent to a musical score in cinema. One is absorbed by affective mechanisms into a meaningful world amplified in magnitude. As we will see, for this reason, the sociological study of moods requires both hermeneutic and psychodynamic methods.

Human perceptions are both culturally and affectively constructed. Geertz elaborates, “if one is sad everything and everybody seems dreary; if one is gay, everything and everybody seems splendid” (97). If culture and affect are co-constitutive of the social world, they nevertheless have different world-creative functions. The *meaningfulness-function* of affect complements and supplements culture’s *meaning-function*. The latter blankets the world with a “lunar-light” or tint, a variation in contrast or brightness, though it is still in some sense “derivative”—Geertz’s word—upon the specific meaning-functions of a semiotic system, religious or not. Mood in its meaningfulness-function serves to make culture more powerful and vivid to human subjects through its heightening or dampening of symbolic action. Affect promotes a worldview by making it more emotionally convincing. In this scheme, culture still gives perception its specific content and affect adds hue and intensity; affects are still discursively organized or culturally channeled.

While improving upon his predecessors, Geertz’s theory of mood is indebted to the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger, whom we should consider here for his reflections on the cognitive-affective constitution of the world.<sup>19</sup> The centrality of mood in social life is one of the less appreciated motifs in *Being and Time*. Heidegger devoted two early sections (29 and 30) on ‘attunement’ (*Befindlichkeit*) and ‘mood’ (*Stimmung*). Attunement is also sometimes translated as a ‘state-of-mind’ and it refers to a more ordinary sense of ‘how one finds oneself.’

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<sup>19</sup> I use both the Macquarrie and Robinson and the newer Stambaugh translations of *Being and Time*.

Attunement is an ontological structure of *Dasein*<sup>20</sup> for Heidegger, which makes possible determinate moods. Heidegger writes that “ontologically mood is a primordial kind of Being for Dasein, in which Dasein is disclosed to itself prior to all cognition and volition... We are never free of moods” (1962:175). Affects prefigure the world by orienting or facing the human being in certain directions (1996:129). Heidegger agrees that moods are totalistic: they consist of global attitudes affecting one’s whole experience. Moods are evidence of our human ‘thrownness’ into a world, for Heidegger, because Dasein’s perception of the environment is always already caught within a prior meaningful world disclosed and conditioned by affects and the understanding. This is part of Heidegger’s critique of the analytical theoretical language of other philosophers, whose efforts to explicate the world through derivative scientific languages, he thinks, is futile. Heidegger the existentialist also argues that most moods distract Dasein from the proper question of its Being with the notable exception of the mood of Angst.

The Heideggerian philosophy of affect notoriously rejects projectivist theories of emotion that posit affects as subjective, inward states having nothing to do with an affect-neutral world. He insists that affects actually do construct ‘worlds’ because mood is a core part of the existential constitution of Dasein in its *being-in*. Moods are different ways of being-in-the-world that stimulate a passive ‘surrendering’ of Dasein to what it encounters—the ‘there.’ Hence, Heidegger writes, “the mood brings Dasein before the ‘that-it-is’ of its ‘there’” (1962:175). Moods condition human perception, as Geertz realized, but in an even more fundamental way for Heidegger. Dasein’s usage of ready-to-hand objects in everyday routines is profoundly dependent upon the orientations that moods provide. “When we see the ‘world’ in an unsteady and wavering way in accordance with our moods, what is at hand shows itself in its specific worldliness, which is never the same on any given day” (1996:130). Moods, such as fear,

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<sup>20</sup> “Dasein” is untranslated German for the ‘there being,’ Heidegger’s neologism for talking about human nature.

boredom or joy, restrict Dasein's possibilities of perception of the world, much like looking through tinted glasses restricts possibilities of color.

Heidegger suggests that affect is the condition of the possibility of cultural significance. Moods are "disclosive" (1962:177)—they determine *how things matter* to Dasein. "Mood has always already disclosed being-in-the-world as a whole and first makes possible directing oneself toward something" (1996:129). The mattering of objects, cognitively or aesthetically, is primordially affective. Even a theoretical stance toward nature or the social world inevitably participates in some sort of affective state, albeit a measure of tranquility or contemplation (1996:130). Heidegger-inspired philosophers such as Charles Taylor (1989) likewise posit a close relationship between culture and affect. Taylor inherits from Heidegger the motif of 'mattering' as a general ontological feature of human beings. What 'matters' is of cultural significance or morally valuable. Attunement is a feature of Dasein's being-in-the-world that makes possible the *mattering* of certain objects.

Heidegger's existentialism however lacks the sensitivity to how specific moods are culturally channeled and the subsequent multiplicity of moods that Geertz theorizes better. Geertz's cultural anthropology locates moods within the cultural equipment of a society, enabling him to draw concrete linkages between the cognitive contents of cultural worldviews and shared affects like ethos or mood. Both thinkers highlight the promise of theorizing affective channels and flows with a relational, social ontology. If Geertz mostly placed moods internal to the cultural system, albeit in a different dimension, Heidegger grounds the possibility of culture, religion and morality in the affective structure of Dasein.

I suspect there is a substantive reason why the concept of collective mood has been most fully considered by the tradition of hermeneutics, whether in Geertz's interpretive social science

or in Heidegger's philosophical hermeneutics. What is the nature of collective mood such that it requires both a psychodynamic and interpretive approach?

1) *Collective mood has a hermeneutic structure.*

Classical hermeneutics thought that the meaning of a text could be made apparent from a hermeneutic circle relating preconceptions of the whole to textual parts *ad infinitum*. So too collective mood emerges from the complex relationships between discursive structures of meaning and social-historical situations. The emotional temperature, character and magnitude of mood depends upon the historical events and structures of meaning conditioning it. Moods have a conjunctural ontology: they can emerge from a unique combination of symbol systems, economic forecasts, political failures and surrenders, new alarming social risks and looming catastrophes, levels of trust or distrust in authorities, emotional cultures, theological interpretations of history, new cultural scripts and widely believed myths, etc. Each of these can go into forming a hermeneutical historical experience shared by a generation of people or more specific participants of social events.

Moods are historically thick, thus Geertz the ethnographer was more sensitivity to their multiplicity than Heidegger. Theoretically, a collective mood of some sort should always be present like the aesthetic or musical accompaniment of historical events. They exist and shade the social perceptions of their day in unconscious ways, just as the psychologists of mood asserted the unconscious influence of mood-inducing events upon arousal without the activation of deliberative cognitions. However, the affective intensity of a collective mood can vary across the population according a group's relation to alternative sources of affect and/or the group's level of cognizance or interactional resonance with the mood-constitutive events.

Moods are not necessarily a perfect fit with socio-structural reality. Despite the continuing international power of the U.S., which will most likely continue for several decades, the end of America has already been pronounced. For those who read newspapers and attend university classes, they are likely to have felt this mood of American declinism. Declinism is a significant affective twist in the American public mood considering the nation's historical inclination toward optimism, civil religion and exceptionalism. A widespread emotional shift toward pessimism and resignation is quite an abrupt shift away from the affective-social character described by de Tocqueville in the 1830s. While the current prophets of declinism may be putting the cart before the horse, their hermeneutics certainly make sense of several critical events of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: 9/11, the 'war on terror' and the enlargement of C.I.A. operations and surveillance, Hurricane Katrina, Abu Ghraib coverage in the media, the lack of success in Afghanistan, the great financial crash of 2008 and subsequent recession, unprecedented disapproval ratings of Congress, to name only the darkest events. The enduring, transformative implications of these events in American history is still unclear, but their negative affective valence has already arrived and been spread through the public sphere. The mood of American resignation emerges hermeneutically from these recent historical events.

*2) The social experience of collective mood is shaped by discursive-social conflicts and inequalities.*

Overcoming a bias toward solidarity and integration in cultural theory, Geertz (1973) famously wrote that culture can be a source of social conflict just as frequently as it reinforces communal cohesion. A theory of collective mood likewise needs to take power and inequalities into account to explain the variability of a mood experience, its intensity and character, across a

population. Clearly, collective moods are not one-to-one with a community or a culture. Moods can criss-cross and overlap across societies. Two alternative moods can be experienced by different portions of the population for socio-demographic reasons, such as class, race or age. Moods intersect with inequalities.

There can be a politics of mood when collective emotions are manipulated by the conscious or unconscious strategies of elites. A mood can be amplified by politicians, the mass media, activists, and interests groups, each delivering emotionally saturated scripts to wider audiences. There are many different sources of affect-influence within modern society. It follows then that one's experience of mood will significantly depend upon one's relationship to different sources of affect. For instance, those who watch more television and/or read newspapers are much more likely to have experienced the "war on terror" mood of the U.S. (the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, perhaps longer). Television is a dominant 'spring' of collective moods for large portions of the population: those who watch more television are also more likely to experience a conservative mood of national patriotism than those who watch less or none at all (Phillips 1996).

When moods become political, not always case throughout history, they can facilitate self-identifications with social groups and the collective mobilization of identity markers. Like values and symbolic boundaries, moods are a cognitive-affective linkage that constitute and can be used by subjects. The experience of a particular mood may facilitate making other related affective attachments to identities, to nationality, or to social institutions.

*3) Studying collective mood requires a synthesis of hermeneutics and psychodynamic inquiry.*



Whence the methodology for the study of collective moods? More than any other science, sociology explicitly recognizes the need for methodological pluralism: the nature of the object studied should influence the selection of methods. In the case of collective moods, then, how does the affective dimension morph social inquiry?

This question returns to the problem and possibility of an *affective hermeneutics*. What is ‘understood’ in the empirical study a specific collective mood? Another benefit of my proposed meta-theory of discursive affects is the historicization and transcendence of the problem of rationality in the social sciences. As we saw in the new sociology of values, the rationalistic action schema of means-ends prevented an ontological understanding of the situationality and emotionality of values (Joas 1995). In the case of collective mood, especially, the rationality bias plagues hermeneutic inquiry itself. Collective moods are difficult to study because the interpretive methodology of the social sciences has long been governed by a normative prescription of rationality. The *verstehen* approach of Weberian hermeneutics restricts our understanding action to understanding the rationality of action (Goldthorpe 1998). This corrupts the study of cultural structures with a bias toward strategies and teleology, but it also damages the potential objectual-theoretical construction of collective mood.

Mood requires an affective hermeneutics that matches its cognitive and affective ontological structure. Only an affective hermeneutics can escape the prescriptive rationality of interpretive sociology. Only it can break with the notion that cultural usage and constraints must be rendered as strategic action to informed actors. An affective hermeneutics examines how social perceptions and drives are affectively structured by cultural meanings.

Interpretation can render the feelings of an action context intelligible without relying upon teleological rationality or upon causal narratives. To give an example, I will consider the

recent and highly suggestive proposal of one contemporary sociological theorist. Andrew Abbott (2007) has developed a sort of affective hermeneutics, coining ‘lyrical sociology’ to describe a more affect-sensitive research program. Lyrical sociology’s “ultimate, framing structure should not be the telling of a story—recounting, explaining, comprehending—but rather the use of a single image *to communicate a mood, an emotional sense of reality*” (2007:73, *emphasis mine*). Communicating mood, in all their cognitive and affective specificity, is a goal of an affective hermeneutics. Despite his mid-career ‘narrative positivism,’ here Abbott has resolutely abandoned causal explanations and path-dependency for a new mode of temporality in sociological writing: the *momentary*, emerging from a dialectic between transient perceptions and the more enduring affective properties of a cultural landscape.

Abbott’s affective hermeneutics elevate the importance of sociological *writing* and the rhetorical techniques of communication, to examine how authors can actually transfer a sense of a mood’s character to their audience. The momentary ‘state of being’ at a particular time and place must be rendered vividly by a *lyrical* sociology, inseparably fusing the action context with the authorial context. Communicating feelings through affective hermeneutics requires much more attention to the author’s experience and expression of a collective mood. Abbott is right to point to the style of writing itself since far too much sociology and anthropology, including Geertz’s thick descriptions, continues to aim at inter-contextual transparency without recognizing the necessary mediation of embodied writing, including the author’s psychic-affective experiences. A sociology of affect and moods must reflect upon the rhetorical production of empathy through imaginative writing styles.

## V. Symbolic Boundaries

Symbolic boundaries are the last cognitive-affective linkage considered in this essay. This concept is included in my meta-theoretical synthesis for several reasons. One, it has wide-ranging applicability in many different areas and schools of theory in the social sciences. Two, it also provides an empirical site for interrogating the relationship between cognitive-affective hybrids and other important social processes of power, social inequality and identity (though we have already seen the importance of violence and social inequalities to the theory of values and collective mood). Once again, I will argue for an approach that combines the historicism and relationality of discourse theory with a psychoanalytic appreciation of bodily affects.

Symbolic boundaries are powerful cognitive and affective group processes. They have a central function in shaping perception, identity and experiences of selfhood through culturally defined, unequal relationships of likeness and difference. In contemporary sociological theory, symbolic boundaries have focused on the accumulation and transmission of “cultural capital,” associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Michele Lamont (1992; Lamont and Fournier 1992). As expounded by Bourdieu, habitual markers of distinction, through consumption and other customs, enable high-status classes to self-promote and recognize themselves in the social reproduction of stratification. Adding to this school of theory, my framework for analyzing symbolic boundaries will also borrow, again, from poststructural social theory—in Judith Butler’s theory of the discursive and affective constitution of subjects—and from studies of cognitive-affective linkages in nationalism and national feeling—drawing upon the work of Benedict Anderson (1991) and Rogers Brubaker (2009). Lastly, I conclude with several positive theses about the role of symbolic boundaries in subjectivity, group identity, and inequality.

In the broadest sense, symbolic boundaries are the classifications of people and things by the ordering agency of discourse. They are categories or schemata of likeness and difference, grouping some people together to the exclusion of others. While these ordering relationships of inclusion and exclusion are applied to nearly every natural thing, sociologists more frequently use the term to explain the social interactions and segregations of people. In this sense, symbolic boundaries refer to shared identifications of self (singular or plural) and dis-identifications with others.<sup>21</sup> The concept of them is used to advocate a non-essentialist, relational understanding of collective identity. Status, gender, nationality and ethnicity are not pregiven features of the social world, rather they emerge from the activity of distinction via boundary drawing.

The formation of social identities occurs through othering. Michael Schwalbe *et al* (2000) defines ‘othering’ as a process whereby a dominant group brings into public existence an inferior group. Othering involves the use of identity markers and codes to signify membership into a group. This process of forming status distinctions against others can even be seen in scientific practices, when scientists anxiously distinguish empirical knowledge from metaphysics, religion or “pseudo-sciences.” Schwalbe rightly recognizes the processual and relational nature of collective identity, that selfhood emerges in relation to the other. But the *performative* nature of othering must also be noted. The use of symbolic boundaries to privilege one’s group identity *via* othering may succeed or fail. Symbolic boundaries are not automatically effective as social-hierarchical divisions. Their materialization requires performative articulation by groups, which can be challenged even when it is successful.

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Lichterman (2008) describes this social process as a collective “mapping.” Through mapping, civil groups and social movements define their relationship to their environment and to various audiences. Mapping includes both the internal and external sides of boundary drawing: conceptions about what members share within the group and how members place the group in relation to out-groups. For Lichterman, boundary drawing or mapping is a core social factor that mediates between cultural repertoires—religious knowledge and know-how in his case studies—and a group’s identity (I will expand upon this point in my second thesis below).

Poststructural social theory argues that we must recognize the inevitable exclusions produced by any identity category serving as a source of solidarity, whether nationality or human rights. In identity performances, subjects appeal to discourse to the peril of others rendered non-intelligible by it. Becoming a subject demands a form of centering and marginalization, i.e., gaining subjectivity requires denying that property to others. Feminist social theorists like Kristeva and Butler describe how subjectivity depends upon the “constitutive exclusion” of abjection. The object is expelled and then repelled, i.e. discursively rendered as other and then displaced as the object of intense emotional dislike or fear (Butler 1990:182). Social power is thus not primarily between pre-given actors competing for pre-given resources. Instead, power discursively constitutes the subject and its others. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) likewise ground their social ontology on the inherent negativity and indeterminateness of the world: my subjectivity is threatened by the subjectivity of others. The social field consists of constitutive antagonisms upon which subjects struggle to articulate themselves through symbols and boundaries.

We can see here how affects are not so much felt by individuals as that individuals are affectively produced. Subjectification depends upon affective attachments that are discursively structured. Of these attachments, the protection of socially shared boundaries is paramount. Boundary work conditions subjectivity on at least two levels: *social identities*, to which one can be a member, and *personhood*, how a culture distinguishes between the self and the other and between subjects and objects. Social identities include gender, race and ethnicity, civic and religious groups, nationality, etc. Personhood, on the other hand, refers to the form of self-consciousness and the sense of having a self or status as a subject. It can overlap or intersect with social identities, but Western discursive formations circumscribe it as a property within the

*individual body*, a specific symbolic-boundary formation which should not be universalized.<sup>22</sup>

On both levels, the maintenance of symbolic boundaries links cognitive cultural structures to the affective constitution of subjectivity. The sociology of symbolic boundaries has tended to focus on social identities, but other theorists have argued that even the bodily borders of selfhood are culturally variable.

For instance, symbolic anthropologists like Mary Douglas (1966) and Marshall Sahlins (1976) have long been aware of the operation of symbolic boundaries upon the body. In their writings can be found an implicit realization of the intersection between cognition and affect in boundary drawing processes. Douglas observes the repulsiveness of the *anomalous* object that violates cultural classification systems. Both aboriginal and modern societies institute pollution rituals to cognitively-affectively manage chaos and the unclean according to a cultural order. The body likewise becomes a symbol of social boundaries with bodily orifices representing symbolic danger.

Judith Butler (1990) radicalizes the connection that Douglas finds between the body and boundaries. Butler argues that the body is not just a symbol of social boundaries, but that bodily boundaries are themselves products of the cultural order and its “regulatory grid of intelligibility.” Symbolic boundaries have a central constitutive role in the production of identity: subjectivity is the signifying practice of the body identifying and placing markers on the body. These bodily significations are always specific to a discursive regime of power, a grid of classifications reiterated in identity performances. Butler’s poststructuralist theory recognizes multiple levels of symbolic boundaries: the body, the subject, and one’s race or gender or other social identities—all of these intersecting with each other and constituted by specific discursive formations.

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<sup>22</sup> I pick up this argument again in my third thesis below.

The sociological analysis of national identity and nationalism has been crucial to the development of the theory of symbolic boundaries and is touched upon here insofar as it illustrates the collective intersection between cognition and affect. According to Benedict Anderson, national ideologies are based on an imagination of fellow citizens, as one's temporal partners, and a commitment to boundaries that are geographically and linguistically defined. In Anderson's historical account of the rise of national consciousness, "imagined communities" are cognitive and affective states of social being. Nationalness consists of both a transformation in collective *consciousness*—toward empty calendrical temporal simultaneity—and shared *feelings* of solidarity between members of the nation whom have never actually meet. National citizens are aware of each other and feel "complete confidence in [each other's] steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity," a collective self-consciousness partially made possible by the modern literary conventions of novels and newspapers (1991:26). Anderson's intent is to explain how the deep "emotional legitimacy" of nationality came about to such an extent that now the nation is universally modular across the globe (1991:4).

National affects emerged from several social changes in the economy and transformations in culture. According to Anderson, the primary sacrosanct object of national affective attachments is language. His narrative shows how print-capitalism gave rise to quasi-vernacular print-languages in European metropolises and the many colonies of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Despite the modernity of print-languages, they are naturalized as the nation's primordial past and ground. Anderson writes that "nothing connects us affectively to the dead more than language" (1991:145). Shared language, not blood relations, is the basis of the nation's invented ethnicity.

The fictitiousness of ethnic nationalism does not decrease the deep “attachments that people feel for the inventions of their imaginations” (1991:141). The supposed disinterested purity of the nation motivates self-sacrifice and military service. Patriotism, a complex cognitive-affective formation in itself, springs from the “aura of finality” surrounding national boundaries. These boundaries between modern nations are primarily linguistic as seen in collective affective attachments to the national language readily observable in anthems and patriotic poetry. To rephrase Anderson’s thesis in expressions of contemporary sociology, linguistic capital is the relational basis of national distinction and ethnic boundary drawing work.

Generalizing a theory of cognitive-affective linkages from Anderson’s seminal work, we could say that national affects are suspended between economies, ideologies and political powers. Economic conditions of print-capitalism were a necessary cause of nationalism and seem to be the primary causal mover in Anderson’s history. Anderson sees no need to comply with traditional dichotomies between economy and culture though, and to their mutual embeddedness, he adds the affective dimension. Although shared affects are rarely autonomous causal agents in themselves, i.e. from discourse, politics and the economy, that is no reason to impoverish our conceptions of social life by taking them out of the equation. In Anderson’s analysis, shared affects are discursively and technologically dependent and thus thoroughly historical in nature, even manipulable as an instrument of power. Anderson describes how, at first, dynastic-feudal monarchs found nationalism and feelings of nationalness useful in extending their power—he calls this “official nationalism”—before eventually the egalitarian-horizontal nature of the ideology eventually pulled the carpet out from under them. The meta-theory of cognitive-affective linkages is intended to be agile enough to competently deal with the multiplex interactions between culture, the economy and politics, and I offer it to help



sociological theory catch up with already charted historical-empirical realities like the affective experience of national boundary drawing

For over a decade now, Rogers Brubaker (2009; Brubaker and Cooper 2000) has been arguing against substantialist notions of identity. He makes a persuasive case that ‘identity’ should be replaced with the word ‘identification,’ among other more dynamic sounding words, in order to emphasize the active and processual nature of identity-formation. He has applied this insight to the study of ethnicity and nationality in particular. Identification with ethnic or national cognitive schemata is a highly affective psychodynamic process. Agents draw upon boundaries and other markers to bind together groups with varying levels of “groupness.” Sociologists, therefore, should not take any identity group for granted as a pre-given unit, because group formation is variable in its success, based on how tightly cognitive-affective linkages are interwoven. Brubaker’s theory of identification is valuable for bringing out the collective and the processual development of cognitive-affective linkages.

A further implication of Brubaker’s work is the inseparability of sociological and psychological theory. Despite the disciplinary anxiety of sociology’s own boundary-work, bracketing out psychological processes from sociological analysis can misconstrue the phenomena at stake, as in the reifications of a sociology of identity without identification, or in a theory that naturalizes ethnicity apart from ethno-racial boundary processes or that theorizes the nation without nationalism and national feeling. Brubaker is right to defend a “psychodynamic” perspective, and sociologists could do worse than reconsidering Freud’s original group psychology as a neglected classic in a social psychology of this sort. In that work (Freud 1959),

Freud explains feelings of membership through social-psychological dynamics of introjection and idealization.<sup>23</sup>

*1) Symbolic boundaries are arbitrarily defined by discourse*

Discursive structures of meaning make categories and classify people and things within those categories. Symbolic boundaries in the broadest sense merely refer to the meaningful, ordering relationships promoted by discourse, boundaries distinguishing what fits in a category from what is excluded. Symbolic boundaries are the relationships made intelligible by these categories, not always being about persons though often they are.

This broad understanding of symbolic boundaries is not necessarily connected to social relations of power: color categories or numerical categories, though they can become vehicles of social distinction, are not in themselves imbued with power. On the other hand, many social theorists agree that *all inequalities in the social world*, whether by class or gender stratification or ethno-racial discrimination, *are based on the discursive power of symbolic boundaries*. Assenting with this proposition also affirms that inequalities are not natural. They are the product of arbitrary structures of meaning, namely the categories of people they specify as superior or inferior. To summarize: not all symbolic boundaries are sources of inequality, especially categories not dealing with people, but all social inequalities are grounded upon symbolic boundaries. Person-making symbolic boundaries construct subjects with or without status.

The sociology of symbolic boundaries thus has a critical thrust to it. It seeks to de-naturalize inequalities by uncovering their cultural grounding in a conceptual system of

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<sup>23</sup> *Introjection* is a psychological condition of feelings of group solidarity. It occurs when individuals internalize their social bonds with other group members. *Idealization* is responsible for charisma and obedience to authority. It is a process of collective cathexis, when a leader or a leading idea is simultaneously *cathected* by multiple egos. Freud develops a such mechanics for explicating the psychodynamic intersection of cognition and affect, even doing so on an explicitly collective level.

classification. The social analysis of symbolic boundaries exposes the historical variability and contingency of inequality. Race is not biological but a historically specific construction; gender differences have taken many different forms across cultures, not limited to asymmetrical binarisms. Symbolic boundaries are not natural, nor eternal—they are continual performances that can be contested and changed.

However, symbolic boundaries are not effective in producing inequality apart from the social groups appropriating and implementing them. Boundaries are managed by a wide array of social groups, formulating their own interpretations and boundary expectations in practice. Cultural codes do not automatically materialize; rather, communities interpret and apply those codes to their situation, constructing a shared perception of in-groups and out-groups. Several sociologists have recently emphasized the group processes and practices that mediate culture's influence over perception and action in this way (Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003; Lichterman 2008; Schwalbe et al 200).

In the interactionist theory of Schwalbe and his colleagues, for instance, boundary-maintenance is one of four generic reproduction processes generating social inequalities. They define boundary-maintenance as the social activity of transmitting cultural capital through access to selective networks. The transmission of capital largely takes place behind the scenes, serving to naturalize inequality in social perceptions. Their emphasis on the processual dynamics of inequality fits well with a relational perspective in sociological theory, as found in Brubaker's critique of identity substantialism above. It also goes to show how inequalities are not natural or simply inherited from past times—they are historical and continually reiterated through practice.

Social boundaries divide people into classes and hierarchies, but the symbolic basis of division varies radically from context to context. Almost anything can become a vehicle of

boundaries and a signifier of in-group or out-group status. Amy Wilkins (2008a; 2008b) has demonstrated how emotional cultures—e.g. happiness at a Christian college, macabre angst for a goth subculture, etc.—and sexual practices became the basis of youth identity, distinguishing insiders from “mainstream” others. Emotions and sexuality are signifiers of identity combining with other cultural elements, like styles of dress, music, and hairstyle—all of which can become symbolic vehicles of insider status.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, religious beliefs and practices can be another such signifier of difference. In their studies of American national identity, Penny Edgell and her colleagues (Edgell and Tranby 2010; Edgell et al 2006) have shown that religious belief—no matter what kind of deity, God, Buddha or ‘universal spirit’—is a marker of belonging to the American national community. Most Americans draw a symbolic boundary between pious faith-believing citizens and the atheist as other. Overall atheists are more despised than any other socially feared and *stereotyped* category, from immigrants to homosexuals to Muslims. This symbolic boundary is the object of intense emotional attachments and the source of hostile feelings.

*2) Social boundaries emerge from a reciprocal relationship between cultural classifications and group psychology.*

Symbolic boundaries are not purely cognitive. They become the object of the affective attachments of social groups, enforcing and protecting the distinctions they make between people. These person-making boundaries can evoke depths of emotional intensity, as seen in

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<sup>24</sup> Wilkins also revealed that the purpose of some symbolic boundaries may be to conceal others. Behind seemingly innocent subcultural variations and practices of distinction, group members may be getting training in cultural and technological capital that reproduces their middle class success later in adulthood. Thus, class reproduction is again naturalized through the transmission of capital. Or, subcultures based on an explicitly egalitarian identity, may turn out to naturalize other masculine privileges.

nationalism studies and Edgell's research on the 'atheist as other.' Symbolic boundaries are important in mobilizing and purifying group identity, and for this function, they pull together both cognitive and affective dimensions. This intersection or linkage between cognitive and affective elements emerges from a reciprocal relationship between discourse and group psychodynamics. An example from above: those who watch more television usually feel more intense national affects and attachments to those symbolic boundaries in the modern political world (Phillips 1996).

Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003) argue that boundaries are one element of a situationally determined group style. They define a 'group style' as interactional rules and expectations held by members of a group. These patterns depend on speech norms, expected member responsibilities, and boundary conceptions—what members of the group have in common and what the group's relationship to other publics looks like. A group style, for instance, of seriousness or horseplay emerges from such rules, including opinions and feelings toward outsiders.

Group boundaries can vary in several regards according to the overall group style: groups can have rigid boundaries that are impermeable and highly exclusive to outsiders, or groups can tolerate porous, more inclusive boundaries. Porosity or exclusivity is scalar property of group interactions shaping that group's experience and perceptions. Eliasoph and Lichterman propose that such variable boundary qualities mediate the influence of culture upon actions and attitudes held by the group. Boundaries are part of a group interactional style influencing how collective representations are understood and interpreted. Phillips (1996) observes this process occurring on a national level. The intensity and exclusivity of emotional attachments to national boundaries influences attitudes toward issues like multiculturalism and aboriginality in Australia.

Thus, there can be different modes of boundary drawing. Some social groups experience insider/outsider boundaries as clearly delineated and mutually exclusive. For others, boundaries are fuzzy and there is more tolerance for a brackish zone of social interactions. Child psychology also verifies an alternative experience of boundaries not obeying the logic of a mutually exclusive self-other distinction. Psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott (1971) identified an intermediate stage in a child's psychological development in between a state of psychic undifferentiation ("subjective omnipotence") and a world of clear separations between subjects and objects. For the toddler, the "transitional object," e.g. the blanket or doll, is not seen as separate from one's selfhood. A similar variation in the experience of boundaries occurs within social groups and national identity. Some religious civic groups do not make a firm distinction between church and the world; other evangelical groups are more likely to (Lichterman 2008). Transgression and impurity is not necessarily perceived as a major social threat. It depends upon the group style and the interactional setting—the porosity of a group's boundaries, the depth of their emotional attachments and concern with orderliness. In some cases, a transgression may be punished, like an impurity expelled so as to re-naturalize symbolic boundaries. In other cases, blurred boundaries may be tolerated, even appreciated, or seen as a resource for the de-naturalization of boundaries through civil society struggles.

*3) Some symbolic boundaries are more constitutive of the self than others.*

Above, I distinguished between the boundary drawing of social identities and a more basic type of symbolic boundary constituting personhood, such as a subject's experience of bodily borders. On several levels, symbolic boundaries are central to the discursive constitution of subjectivity. Contemporary social psychologists and poststructuralist social theorists would

agree on this point. Social identity theory explores how groups reinforce collective identities through us-them distinctions surrounding nationality, sexuality, race and ethnicity, religion, class, etc. However, I suspect that symbolic boundaries are also operating on the basement level of subjectivity, in regards to core distinctions between self and other, between humans and non-humans, between different kinds of bodies, between first-person and second- or third-person speech, etc. Constructing these boundaries, done in a multitude of ways across cultures, is a necessary condition of subjectification.

Even basic boundaries between self and other are historically specific and culturally variable (Geertz 1973). Deborah Rose's self-critical ethnography of Australian aboriginal communities gives a lucid example of this variability (Rose 1999). The aboriginal experience of personhood does not recognize the individual as the proprietor of the body as Western cultures do. Personhood extends beyond the interiorless body to include special geographical places, other living creatures, sacred totemic animals and plants, etc. In other words, Australian aboriginal culture maps an alternative set of symbolic boundaries between self and other. A multiplicity of living things, including a Nature imagined as sentient, can participate in the same shared subjectivity. Clifford Geertz (1973) has made similar observations of Balinese culture: instead of being delimited by the boundaries of the individual, subjectivity can be attached to a social role and ritual that various persons can occupy. Subjectivity is a culturally defined performance, repeated throughout time by different bearers.

Perhaps, poststructuralist theories of subjectivity are so refreshing because they apply some of this strangeness to Western practices and perceptions: various bodies can occupy *subject-positions* demarcated by the discursive-technological arrangements of schools, factories, offices, homes, etc., so that subjectivity is more a property of places and roles, rather than human

individuals. Indeed, the posthumanist or actor-network branch of poststructuralism asserts that nonhuman entities, from experimental cyborg mice to mega-computers, are equally subjects according to their place in a discursive web of agents.

All this goes to show that even fundamental self-other boundaries are variable, culturally particular and can be usefully be re-imagined in alternative non-Western ways. My final point is that sociologists should be careful before universalizing contemporary identity politics and other modern performances of social identity in nation, sexuality, subculture, class or gender. Social identities depend upon a bedrock of self-other distinctions. If this bedrock changes, so does the possibility and nature of social identities. Identity politics today is conditioned by deep discursive shifts toward an expressive conception of subjectivity, emerging from counter-enlightenment European Romanticism (Taylor 1989). The idea that one's symbolic gestures are expressive of an internal primordial identity is a presupposition promoted by romantic Western conceptions of subjectivity. It makes possible individual practices of the self as well as wider civil society movements mobilized by the search for social recognition.

Accordingly, my preferred model of subjectivity has two corresponding tiers. First, there is a basic skeletal structure of subject-functions, widely shared across cultures, though manifest in numerous different configurations.<sup>25</sup> This level of subjectivity is observed most frequently by cognitive psychologists and linguists, but also the occasional anthropologist or sociologist, as in the Chicago School's early 20<sup>th</sup> century theorizing of the self. On top of this base, there is another layer of social identities, discursive interpellations, identifications with groups,

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<sup>25</sup> Despite this great diversity, there are probably limits to the variability of human personhood. The universality of these limits is due to a number of subject-functions or self-schema, which can be turned on or off depending on the cultural context. Not all human societies turn on the cognitive switch, so to speak, that draws a clear and sharp distinction between the self and the world. Linguists have also shown how quite different languages can emerge from the same deep 'universal grammar' of the human brain (Chomsky 1965). Analogously, there are basic subject-functions, deeper for instance than national identity no matter how intense a country's nationalism is. Some such boundaries are more intense and tacit in our experience than others, they structure everyday self-perception and interaction in fundamental ways.



subcultural identities, religions, nations, and forms of community belonging. Sociologists and cultural anthropologists excel at interpretive analysis on this level. Both tiers though are discursive in nature and both depend upon the cognitive-affective activity of othering and boundary drawing.

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