

Emotions and Social Relations

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Introduction: Feeling and Emotion as Patterns of Relationship

... the relationship between the self and others, and the relationship between self and environment, are, in fact, the subject matter of what are called ‘feelings’ – love, hate, fear, confidence, anxiety, hostility, etc. It is unfortunate that these abstractions referring to *patterns* of relationship have received names, which are usually handled in ways that assume that the ‘feelings’ are mainly characterised by quantity rather than by precise pattern. This is one of the nonsensical contributions of psychology to a distorted epistemology. (Bateson, 1973: 113)

What Bateson says above is something we still need to ponder 40 years after his words were first published, because the nonsensical contribution not only of psychology but also of our commonsense language to the misapprehension of what feelings and emotions are really about still persists to this day. Because feelings and emotions have received names like love, hate, fear and anxiety, we tend to think about them as though they are ‘things’ in themselves, entities that exist and can be known if only we can accurately trace their roots back to a causal origin. In commonsense terms, because feelings and emotions are registered first of all by our bodies, we think and speak as if the source of emotion was our own individual bodies and minds. As Bateson says above, it is as if feelings were quantities that existed inside us, ones that we struggle to express and quantify in words. A mother may say to her child, ‘I love you more than I can say’, telling the child both what her feelings about it are and also measuring that love as a quantity, in this case one that is off the scale of verbal measure. Or we may say to a loved one, ‘I love you more than anyone else in the whole

world', showing that our love for that particular person is greater than for anyone else.

Where our commonsense language misleads us by naming specific feelings and emotions is by encouraging us to feel and think about them as if they were private entities that originate in our bodies or minds. But if we think more about the brief examples given above in Bateson's terms, we can see that what we refer to when we express feelings and emotions is our *relationship* to other people. When we say to a child or a lover that we love them more than words can say or more than anyone else, we are saying something about not only the bodily feelings they evoke in us but also the special nature of our relationship to them and how this is different from our relations to others. What our feelings and emotions are the subject matter of, then, are *patterns of relationship* between self and others, and between self and world. It is not only other people we can fall in love with; we can love a landscape, our homes, a treasured personal possession, a piece of music – the list could go on. Our love expresses our relationship to our world and specific people or things within it. It is not wrong, then, to identify feelings and emotions as occurring in the body, because in part they do so: we could not feel without a body and mind which register our feelings and are conscious of having them. The problem comes when the explanation of emotion stops there, with the feeling itself as a thing that is not connected to the wider world of relations and the pattern of relationships.

This problem also exists in psychology, as Bateson said above, for the discipline has tended to fall into commonsensical assumptions about emotions, contributing to our distorted understanding of them. In general terms, most psychologists assume that the words we have for emotions refer to entities that can be described in neuropsychological terms, as to do with underlying neuro-circuitry or cognitive predispositions to certain emotional responses. It is these underlying body–brain systems and networks that produce the emotion, or more to the point, they *are* the emotion. This explanation misses the patterns of relationships in which those emotions emerge in the first place and in which they make sense. Because psychology is a subject that focuses on the individual, the emotion is seen as something to do with what is happening in the individual's body-brain, rather than understanding the embodied person – and their emotional experiences – within patterns of relationship.

Let me give an example to illustrate this. In the 1990s a BBC television science programme called *Wot You Looking At* focused on aggression and violent acts committed by young men. Like in so many similar programmes concerning human behaviour, the central issue was framed

as whether aggression is something learned or innate. The programme quickly dismissed the idea that aggression in men has genetic causes, an explanation that would attempt to show how, for example, some men are more aggressive than others because of genes inherited from their parents that influence the level of chemical neurotransmitters in the brain like dopamine or serotonin, leading to aggressive responses to situations. This was dismissed because twin studies do not provide the evidence to show that twin brothers are both equally or similarly predisposed to aggressive or violent behaviour. Instead of this the programme alighted on the explanation that aggressive responses to situations had to do with learning from 'the environment', in particular the learning of a cognitive style of thinking we call 'paranoia'. That is to say, aggression was seen as the result of a style of thinking in which other people's behaviour is seen as having a negative intent towards the person concerned, and to that person only. In a revealing interview, one young man, in prison for a series of violent offences, was questioned about his behaviour and recounted an incident on a train with a stranger. The man had got on a train with his pregnant wife to find a woman sitting in one of the seats they thought they had booked. An argument developed with the woman, who was said to have got really upset, and although there were other empty seats in the carriage, the man dragged the woman out of the seat and onto the floor and spat on her. The interviewer asked why he'd acted in this way and the man replied it was because of, 'The way she was talking to me, the way she looked down on me'. When asked how he knew the woman looked down on him, he replied, 'The way she was talking to me like a stuck-up snob. She might come from a posh house and a posh area but she got up my nose and I let her fucking know about it 'n' all. ... I thought I'm not having you telling me where my wife's sitting. My wife'll sit there if she fucking wants.'

Psychologists involved in the programme explained this in terms of paranoia because, without any objective justification, this man had interpreted the woman's actions as specifically directed against him, as belittling him. Someone else could have shrugged this off as a simple misunderstanding or confusion and found another empty seat. But this man saw himself as being belittled and had to take a stand, one that restored his status through an aggressive act. Indeed, talking about his string of violent offences and his childhood, the man recalled a formative incident when he was 11 years old. At primary school another child had punched him on the nose and he went home crying to his father, who told him, 'Don't you come crying to my door'. Instead the father – who was described as a 'very violent man' – instructed his son to pick up a milk bottle from the doorstep, go back to the school and smash the

bottle over the head of the child who had punched him. If he didn't do this his father told him, 'Don't come back to my door again'. Although as a child he felt frightened doing this, he did as his father told him and 'it solved the problem'. This then set up a pattern that lasted throughout his life to that point, which he summarised as, 'you've got a problem, you get into a fight, you go out of your way to hurt 'em'. The psychological explanation here is that a paranoid cognitive style of thinking was developed in this man's life which regularly resulted in aggression in order to right the wrongs he felt that others, and the world, were doing to him.

Although I will argue here that such explanations are not entirely wrong, I do believe they are limited, for a number of reasons. First, this is because to look for the cause of aggression will be always a futile search because we are assuming aggression is a thing which has a cause. Many years ago the social psychologists Sabini and Silver (1982) argued there is no such thing as aggression that can be isolated and studied, because aggression is not a thing but a moral evaluation we make of people's actions. Aggression is the name we give to a certain act where, for a variety of reasons, someone or something is attacked, physically or verbally, in a way that a moral community finds unjustifiable. If you are walking home at night and you are attacked and robbed in a subway, this would be seen as an act of aggression. However, if you fight back, provided that the force you use is seen as proportionate, you will not be labelled as aggressive: like the old lady fighting off her attackers with a walking stick or shopping bag, you might even be seen as a hero. So it is not an act of violence or even the feeling or motive behind it that constitutes 'aggression': rather, it is the context in which the act occurs and how this is evaluated in moral terms. A headline in a newspaper which read 'Aggressive victim fights off attacker' would not make sense, not because it is ungrammatical in linguistic terms, but because it is ungrammatical in moral terms. This also means, though, that not everyone will agree on what is an act of aggression. Was the invasion of Iraq in 2003 an attack and occupation, or the liberation of the country from dictatorship? What your answer to this question is will depend on your own moral and political views. If, though, there is no objective standpoint on what constitutes an act of aggression, how can it be studied objectively by a science like psychology and a cause for it found which then might be treated?

The second problem I have with psychological explanations of feelings and emotions is that they ignore patterns of relationship. To consider this let's go back to the example above of the young man on the train and the reaction to the woman sitting in his seat. His explanation of his behaviour, that it was provoked by the fact she was looking down on him and being snobbish, reflects a wider pattern of social class

relations in society in which this young man was brought up. In fact, the TV programme in which he featured noted that aggressive acts like his are often committed by men from a lower socioeconomic background. He perceived the woman he attacked as being of a higher social class, as being snobbish and looking down on him, meaning that he felt she considered him of lesser worth. Moreover, she was telling him what to do, or at least that's what he thought, maybe like so many middle-class people he'd encountered in the past, and now he was having none of it. His act of retaliation was certainly aggressive, in that it was morally unjustifiable, and other things he said in the interview showed he realised that himself after the fact. But to say that the act resulted from a cognitive style that can be classified as paranoid is limited, as it looks only at the *psychological* context of the act. After all, everyone checks the looks, gestures and words of those around them and interprets what they might possibly mean, what those people might be thinking or feeling about us. And our interpretations of those looks and gestures can be wrong. What made this particular young man feel he was being looked down on was his perception of his own social class and that of the woman in his seat. Indeed, what is often thought of as paranoid forms of thinking can make more sense when they are put back into the wider context of class relations in society and the social background and relationships of those labelled as paranoid (Cromby and Harper, 2009). In the situation above, patterns of class relations formed a backdrop against which this particular drama played itself out in the immediate relations between three people in a particular situation on a train. Overlapping this was also the biography of each person concerned and the way that orientated them in this situation, in terms of how they related to each other; the patterns of relationships from their past, embodied in their habits of orientation to others, particularly situations of conflict and how they dealt with them, and their bodily dispositions and forms of perception of others and the world, fed into the creation of the drama.

In the case of the young man on the train, his biography is partly composed of the pattern of relationships in which he had lived, in particular his relationship to a violent father. The lesson his father taught him, that a man can restore his pride and dignity through an act of violence, was just one small recounted incident from an entire childhood. To see the learning of such lessons in terms of a cognitive-behavioural style of conditioning ignores the wider social context and the patterns of relationship in which they are set. Given that these kinds of 'random' acts of aggression and violence are mainly committed by *some* men – but still only a minority – from the lower socioeconomic orders, could it be that violence is an easily accessible way of restoring pride and controlling your

world – especially the people around you – in a society that denies this group other resources for power and advancement, such as economic, educational, or other cultural resources? Furthermore, the perpetrators of such acts are mainly men, and thus they cannot be divorced from the more hegemonic forms of masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005) – portrayed in innumerable cowboy and war movies – in which it is seen as part of the nature of masculinity to be able to protect oneself (including one's honour as a man), one's home and family, and the nation-state, by the use of violence. In certain localities and subcultures, a man's use of violence may not only restore his status but win a higher status within that community, although it may get him into trouble with mainstream morality and the law (Marsh et al., 1978).

Overall, though, the argument I am running here is one that I will build throughout this book. That feelings and emotions cannot be understood as things in themselves which, as such, can be isolated and studied. Feelings and emotions only arise in patterns of relationship, which include the way we look at and perceive the world, and these also result in patterns of activity that can become dispositions – ways of acting in particular situations that are not wholly within our conscious control and are, thus, partly involuntary. I say here they are not 'wholly' within our conscious control and are 'partly' involuntary because I think that the study of feelings and emotions calls into question any rigid distinction between consciousness and unconsciousness, and between voluntary and involuntary control. In that sense the idea I will develop here of emotional dispositions is set within this framework, in that by dispositions I do not mean a determination to act in certain ways, or of acts oriented to a given outcome, but a *tendency* to act in particular ways that is highly sensitive and oriented to certain situations as they develop. In this I will follow the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey (1922/1983), who thought that habits of action were flexible responses adaptable to unique situations, rather than mechanical responses with a given outcome. Thus as Dewey said, a person disposed to anger may commit murder only once. That is to say, someone disposed to anger *may* commit an act of violence, but they are not *bound* to: indeed, they may never do so. Yet dispositions such as this are part of what characterise us as individuals, in that our emotional dispositions form part of what others recognise as our personality: Paul is a laid-back kind of guy, while Joe is uptight and anxious.

But in my desire to give you a flavour of the book and the line of thinking I will build, I am getting ahead of myself. In talking about feelings and emotions I need to say something about what they mean and how I will use these terms throughout the book, along with other terms that will be important.

Feeling, Emotion and Affect

In ordinary, everyday language we regularly run the words ‘feeling’ and ‘emotion’ together, as in statements such as ‘I feel love’ or ‘I feel angry’. Indeed, emotion is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd ed.) (or OED) as a ‘strong feeling deriving from one’s circumstances, mood, or relationships with others’ and I want to stick to something like this definition in this book, as it emphasises my view of emotions as relational, although I do not think that emotions necessarily have to be strong feelings. It is not the strength of a feeling that makes it into an emotion. All emotions, though, seem to be certain types of feeling, but not all feelings are emotions. Someone may feel caution about a business deal or nervous before a job interview, but we do not usually class caution or nerves as emotions: more often than not we would just refer to them as feelings. And there are other feelings that are not thought of as emotions at all, such as feeling hungry or feeling pain. In this vein, Cromby (2007) has claimed that there are three categories of feeling: first, feelings experientially constitute the somatic, embodied aspect of emotion, such as the lightheaded sensation in the first flush of love: second, there are extra-emotional feelings like hunger, thirst, or pain, and some feelings like being tickled that have an emotional dimension but are not themselves emotions: third, there are more subtle, fleeting feelings like William James described as the feeling of hesitancy when we say words like ‘if’ or ‘but’. In this latter sense, feelings give us a ‘sense of our embodied relation to the world, and their influence is continuous’ (Cromby, 2007: 102). Because of this we cannot separate out feelings, or emotions for that matter, from our bodily ways of perceiving the world, as perception is the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through senses such as vision, hearing and touch. But sense is more than the organs of sense perception, as the term ‘sense’ also means a feeling that something is the case. Thus, sense in all its meanings, including sense perception, is to do with the bodily relation we have to the world and to other people within it, and feeling and emotion is part of this too.

In fact, what distinguishes feeling and emotion is not just that feeling is the bodily sensation which is central to all experiences of emotion. It is also to do with the social meanings we give to perceptual experiences and the context in which they arise. This is why certain bodily feelings are felt as emotions while others are experienced as feelings. The queasy feeling we get before a job interview – the butterflies in the stomach – we experience as ‘nerves’, whereas the lightheaded feeling and sense of restlessness we get after meeting someone special we experience as an emotion called falling in love. What distinguishes feeling and emotion, then, is not the strength of feeling, because before a big occasion ‘nerves’ can

become overwhelming, even though we wouldn't normally class them as an emotion; nor is feeling a bodily sensation while emotion is not, for as Cromby showed feelings are central to emotions. Rather, it is social meaning and context that distinguish what we feel as an emotion or some other type of experience. If I'm walking down the street and feeling lightheaded and disoriented yet I haven't just met that special someone, I may start to think I'm coming down with the flu rather than falling in love. As John Dewey said, emotions do not get experienced initially as emotions, intrinsically defined as such; rather, 'some cases of awareness or perception are designated "emotions" in retrospect or from without' (Dewey, 1929/1958: 304). When Dewey says here that bodily awareness or perception is designated as emotion, or feeling, in retrospect or from without, what he means is that it is designated in terms of its contextual reference and its social meaning. I would also underline the *relational* quality of what we define as emotion or feeling. It is in relation to others or to certain situations that feelings are identified as specific emotions: that is the reference point by which we can say that I'm in love, am angry or nervous. What is interesting, then, about feeling and emotion is that they are prime examples of how the body and bodily sensations are always fused with social meanings in the patterned relational weavings of our immediate social encounters. Given this, what I will develop throughout this book is an *aesthetic understanding of emotion*, in the sense of aesthetics not as art theory but as the study of how humans make and experience meaning, and how the body is a fundamental element in this (Johnson, 2007).

Indeed, our feelings and emotions, along with other bodily perceptions, are the means by which we meaningfully orientate ourselves within a particular situation, as well as in relation to others who are part of that situation. Throughout our lives we may develop habitual ways of acting and responding emotionally in given situations, but these habits are themselves the sedimentation of past patterns of relationships and actions, and they must be open to change and adaptation to the situations we encounter. None of us are blank slates emotionally, for even in early infancy we have ways of responding to the world that characterise us as emotional beings. Yet as we enter new situations our emotional habits have to be fluid and open enough for us to be able to interpret our circumstances and to reorientate and adjust ourselves according to our changing feelings and thoughts about such circumstances. If we can't do this, we run into trouble. This is something that I hope to develop throughout this book.

There was, though, another term in the OED's definition of emotion above, which was that emotion is a feeling deriving not only from

circumstance and relationships, but also from *mood*. Here, I will follow Denzin's (1984) definition of mood, in that it refers to an emotion that lingers in our dispositions to action and habit, and in our outlook on the world, long after the situation that created it is over. Thus mood is an emotional disposition, both bodily and psychological, that people bring with them from past situations into new ones that may not have relevance to that emotion. We have all experienced this on occasions where a group of people is cheerful and happy and someone comes into the group bad tempered or grumpy. Normally we would say this person was in a bad mood and, not knowing what the reason for this is, we say things like 'what's got into them?' or 'what's eating them today?' A mood, then, is an emotional hangover from other situations that can be long lasting.

Another term that has become increasingly popular in social and psychological research on emotions in recent years is that of 'affect'. However, I do not want to substitute the term affect for emotion, as I have my own definition of emotion as discussed above. Instead, I will use the term affect with reference to the word's subtle shading of three meanings. First, according to the OED, 'affect' means 'to have an effect on' (and note the difference between the terms 'affect' and 'effect', the former meaning something that makes a difference to something else, while the latter means the result of an influence) or 'make a difference to'; this includes the meaning of to 'touch the feelings of' or 'move emotionally'. Here, affect means being changed by a feeling or emotion in relation to someone or something else, so that one is *moved*, quite literally as well as metaphorically, from one state to another. This accentuates the relational aspect of feeling and emotion because it underlines that it is other people and things that we are related to (other bodies and bodily selves) which can affect us, just as we can affect them. Indeed, the word 'emotion' derives from the French *émouvoir* (excite), which in turn is derived from the Latin *emovere*; *movere* meaning 'move'. Emotion, then, is a word derived from the sense of e-motion. My view of emotion is not of a static state or a thing in itself – such as a psychological phenomenon – which then moves us to act, but as movement itself within relations and interaction. In these interactions we are constantly being affected by others, being moved by them to other actions, in the process constantly feeling and thinking – being moved from one feeling or emotion to another.

The second meaning of 'affect' is that we can pretend or enact a particular emotion to have an effect on others, in the sense of *affectation*. The latter term is defined by the OED as 'behaviour, speech, or writing that is pretentious and designed to impress' and as 'a studied display of

real or pretended feeling'. In this sense, we can put on a show of how we feel or perform an emotion for particular effect, especially to draw the required emotion from others or to impress them in some way. When going to shake hands with the bereaved family on the way out of a funeral, one would hardly console them with a big beaming smile and a slap on the back. It would be unacceptable under the circumstances. If one smiled, it would be in a consolatory fashion and usually accompanied with such required words as 'I'm sorry'. In this ritual there is a knowing sense in the use of emotion, especially if one was not close to the deceased and is not feeling any deep sense of grief. This has led some to argue that the production of all emotion is scripted in this way and produced by the 'actor' as required for the situation they find themselves in. Emotion, it is argued, is affected according to the 'feeling rules' for each familiar scenario, which is why emotion has to be regarded as a social construction.

I dispute this account of the production of emotion, although I do not dispute that emotion can be affection in certain circumstance. My argument will be that the first meaning of affect is primary in our experience: a feeling or emotion that *takes us* or *moves us* in ways that we cannot help or prevent. From the experience of the infant wailing and crying for food or for consolation, for satisfaction or protection, to *falling* in love (and such metaphors are significant as I will explain in Chapter 3), the primary experience of feeling and emotion is one of helpless absorption in the experience. Affect in the second sense, meaning affectation, is a secondary phenomenon that occurs only after we have learned to feel. Then, and only then, can we produce emotions to order, ones that are expected of us under certain conditions. In this case it could be said that we produce or perform emotion according to the required feeling rules, but this does not mean that feeling rules produce or construct all social emotional experience. This is just wrong thinking, as I will argue in Chapter 6.

The third meaning of 'affect' in the OED is one related to psychology, that of 'emotion or desire as influencing behaviour'. In psychology this often means emotion as a cognitive or physiological state motivating or driving a particular behaviour. For example, in a recent article, Duncan and Barrett have argued that affect is not the opposite of cognitive styles of thinking or of processing information mentally, but affect actually plays a role in cognition. Thus affective reactions are the means by which 'information about the external world is translated into an internal code or representation', and the term 'affect' itself, rather than 'emotion', is used to denote 'any state that *represents* how an object or situation impacts a person' (Duncan and Barrett, 2007: 1185, my emphasis).

However, as in the case of paranoia that we have just discussed, affect is defined *only* as a *mental representation* that is either the affect itself or the affective response it provokes, as paranoia provoked aggression. But this explanation is framed only in terms of how mental states *represent* the impact of an object or person upon us; it takes no account at all of the bodily relations we have to other people and things, which is to say the way we are *actually* related to them in a shared social world. I do not dispute that the way we relate to people and things leads to mental imagery and the whole realm of the human imagination, as I show in Chapter 3, but I do dispute that the latter is all there is to affect and emotion. In this book I argue against the cognitive way of seeing and understanding emotion as a mental representation, instead putting forward the case for understanding emotion as arising from a context, a set of circumstances and relationships with others and things.

However, it is important to clarify this use of terminology right at the beginning because the term ‘affect’ has so many different uses in social, psychological and cultural studies. In this last discipline the ‘turn to affect’ has been highly influential in the last 10 years, and once again the term ‘affect’ takes on a characteristic meaning within cultural studies (Blackman and Venn, 2010). Just as the 1980s was characterised by the ‘turn to language’ or to ‘discourse’ in many of the social sciences, now many in cultural studies are turning away from language as a key to the meaning of human cultural interchange and focusing on affect instead. Following Massumi (2002), in cultural studies the term ‘affect’ is defined as being about the *intensity* of experience rather than its quality or its discursive meaning. Thus, the quality of an experience is to do with the emotion associated with it, something which can be expressed in language or discourse, while affective intensity is non-representational and non-conscious, therefore escaping all attempts to articulate it. Unlike in the psychological sciences, affect is seen as relating to the body rather than the conscious mind, and is concerned with the flow of intensities that pass and circulate between bodies, almost like a contagion. Because of this, affect is also characterised as non-rational and accounts for the irrational forces that can grip whole communities, such as outbreaks of mass hysteria or panic which affect a collective body as well as an individual one. As Seigworth and Gregg state,

... affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds. ... Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other*

than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion.
(Seigworth and Gregg, 2010: 1, emphasis in original).

The danger in this view is that affect, seen as a force, intensity or valence, comes to be understood as being like electricity as it passes through a circuit; a current with its own charge that comes to 'stick' to bodies and worlds. But if affect is generated by bodies affecting other bodies in a relational patterning, affect is not something separate from bodies that can stick to them. Affect is not a mystical force or a charge akin to an electrical current, but is a material process of its own kind created by body-selves acting in relational concert. This idea can be accommodated in some studies of affect, such as Henriques' (2010) account of the affect of music – its vibrations, frequencies and rhythms – on the bodies of dancers in a dancehall in Kingston, Jamaica, allowing them to feel their body movements in a syncopated pattern. This is a material process that emerges from the patterned figuration of dancing bodies responding to the music, especially the low-pitched bass-line of reggae, and to other bodies in the room. The material frequencies and vibrations of the amplitudes and timbres of sound resonate with the corporeal rhythms of the crowd pulsating with kinetic dance rhythms. These are felt in the body as frequencies that translate into the collective movements of dance.

But this also raises questions about affect as being something other than conscious knowing; indeed something which is inassimilable and always in excess of consciousness. This is because those people moving their bodies in the dancehall 'know' full well what they are doing: it is just that this is not an intellectual form of knowing, like knowing about the gravitational forces by which the earth revolves around the sun (gravitational forces themselves being generated by moving bodies in space and time that do not stick to them), nor is it a practical kind of knowing, like knowing how to make a meal from a learned recipe. It is more a knowing on the level of a feeling for the rhythm and how to move your body in sync with it and with other bodies – although some have a better feel for this than others. This calls into question the rigid distinction between the conscious and unconscious, as feelings are a primary element of consciousness itself (Peirce, 1902/1966). Moreover, the joy that people can feel in situations where they are dancing with others is not simply a named conscious emotion, because central to the experience is the feeling of life and freedom of movement that *is* joy. Furthermore, I do not think we can separate out the intensity of such experiences from the quality of them, for the greater the quality of the experience of a night out dancing, the more intense the experience will

be. How we are affected by this quality of the experience as a whole will also influence what emotions we feel, whether that is joy, or feelings such as euphoria or transcendence. It therefore seems to me impossible to separate out terms such as affect, emotion and feeling as standing for different experiences that exist in different realms, i.e. the unconscious as opposed to the conscious, the bodily as opposed to the discursive.

Although it is true that we cannot always name what we feel, either as distinct feelings or as emotions, it is a wrong move to then say that feeling or affect is something other than the discursive and the conscious, belonging in the realm of the body. This is because, if we adopt Merleau-Ponty's view, language itself is not a disembodied phenomenon, belonging in the realm of abstract linguistic or grammatical rules. Language is not learned by children as an intellectual exercise, although that may be true of learning grammar in school; primarily, though, language is learned habitually *as a practice* before it can be contemplated intellectually. This is how we know what we are going to say before we have actually said it, without articulating the words first of all for ourselves or for others: it is because speech is 'a certain use of my phonatory apparatus and a certain modulation of my body as being in the world' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012: 425). Speech and thought does not *represent*, it is an expression of my bodily belonging to the world and the situations within it. Thus in circumstances where I feel surprise, reactions like 'Oh no!' or 'Look out!' are not verbal or mental representations that then need to be expressed; rather, they are bodily expressions of my being in that particular situation at that time and how I am affected by it. It is the way I feel that speaks in such circumstances, meaning that feelings and emotions can speak – they have a voice and a specific intonation. As in reactions of surprise, utterances like 'Oh no!' or 'Look out!' will have a sense of bodily urgency to them, illustrated here on the page by my use of exclamation marks. Likewise, if I'm deeply in love with someone I may end up blurting out the words 'I love you' despite my best efforts to suppress it. These spontaneous uses of language are learned, just as the words they utilise are learned, but they become as 'second nature' to us because they are as natural as many other uses of our bodies (like dancing in the dancehall).

As William James noted, more subtle feelings are also involved in the bodily use of language, written or spoken, especially where we *feel* the hesitancy in words like 'if' or 'but'. So while Massumi (2002) defines affect as to do with the body's capacity for movement and change, in contradistinction to the idea of the body in theories of discourse which freeze it in a static discursive position, this is a critique of just one *particular* post-structural informed view of discourse and language. Another

view, such as Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological understanding of language, fuses the body and the many ways it can be affected with bodily movement and the bodily use of language.

What this means is that throughout this book I will not take a position where the term 'affect' means something radically different from emotion. This does not mean I have no affinity with some elements of the theories of affect in cultural studies, as I am also attempting to view emotion in terms of relationality and embodied movement. However, I do not take the view that the embodied capacity to be affected by other bodies, human or non-human, takes us beyond emotion, language and consciousness in its various forms. I side more with the view of Wetherell (2012), who has developed the concept of 'affective practice' to argue that affect is to do with embodied meaning-making that has both pattern and order, while also being capable of creating conditions which open us up to fluid, indeterminate and radically shifting possibilities. The idea of affective practice also constantly orients us to the view that affect and emotion, as embodied meaning-making, is something that we *do* within social life, instead of being subject to unconscious forces and intensities that flow through relational figurations. Wetherell also wants us to look at the cycles and rhythms of affective practices, although these are never clearly explained; thus, 'affect does display strong pushes for pattern as well as signalling trouble and disturbance in existing patterns' (Wetherell, 2012: 13). However, I want to think of pattern as patterns of relationships and that affect does not push for this or disturb it (how could 'it' if affect is not a thing in itself and is about practice) but is part of relational configurations and, as such, is a complex phenomenon.

Complex Emotions

I have no doubt that affect is an aspect of human practice, but looking at emotional or affective practices in isolation is not so telling. Indeed, one of the problems in studying emotion is there seem to be so many aspects to experiencing emotion that focusing on one in isolation gives only a partial picture. But then how do we account for them all, especially when many aspects of emotional experience, such as cognition or embodied emotion, are often taken as in opposition to each other? My solution is to view emotions as complexes, where the many different components of emotions are configured to form the whole emotional experience. Here, when I say emotions are complex phenomena I mean 'complex' in both senses of the term. First, that emotions are complex in that they consist of many different aspects of experience which are connected together,

albeit temporarily, to create an emotional experience. And, second, emotions are complex in that they are not easy to understand because they are complex and intricate phenomena.

In the first sense of the term 'complex', I mean that emotions are complex in that they are composed of different but interrelated aspects of experience, and some of these I have already touched on, such as the bodily, the psychological, the discursive or linguistic, and the biographical. However, simply lumping these together and saying that they somehow overlap to create emotions would be highly unsatisfactory. *My argument here is that we are always in patterns of relationship to other people and to the world, and feelings and emotions form our embodied, mindful sense of different aspects of those relationships.* Without that relational sense there would be no feeling or emotion. I cannot love or hate someone or something without reference to the way I am related to them and they are related to me in given, specific situations and contexts. It is this that gives my feelings meaning and sense, in that when we love or hate someone it is usually for a reason to do with the way they have affected us or the way they have behaved in a certain situation. At the same time, though, we would not *feel* these things were it not for our body-minds which register these feelings at some level, in the case of love not only as an interpersonal attraction but often as a physical attraction as well. That does not mean that these feelings, some of which are emotions, are 'natural' in the sense that they are biologically given and then simply expressed or understood through social meanings and language. Rather, because we grow up as social language users, speech, like feeling, is one of the uses and modulations of our body, so that what we feel and think is never something different from the sense of speech and, more generally, of language and social meaning. Like the man on the train who behaved aggressively to the woman sitting in his wife's seat, his emotional response cannot be understood separately from the social meaning the situation had for him, of social status positions and his fear of being belittled. These situations are complex because they involve human bodies and minds in socially meaningful situations; without the body-mind we could not *feel* our situations and patterns of relationship with others, yet without the social meaning of these relations and situations our feelings and emotions would be random and meaningless. Attempts to reduce the understanding of emotion to psychological, physiological, neurological, or even to social situations in themselves, will only ever be partial and unsatisfactory. *A complex understanding of emotion allows us to understand how socially meaningful relationships register in our body-minds and, at some level of awareness, are felt.* Emotions always have

elements of the socially meaningful and discursive as they are embodied in specific situations.

Emotions, then, are also complex in that they are complicated and intricate phenomena. However, there is also a third meaning to the word 'complex', which is its reference to someone overly preoccupied or fixated with an idea, usually about themselves, as in, 'He's got a complex about his weight' or 'She's got a complex about her lack of education'. In psychoanalysis the term has been used to denote a psychic condition in which repressed or partly repressed mental contents cause internal conflict which is manifest as unusual or abnormal ideas or behaviour. In this way, neurotic or hysteric behaviour is understood as the result of complexes. This is an explanation that I reject, largely because, once again, it rests on certain emotional or behavioural states as being the result of mental processes only. Yet in my understanding of feeling and emotion complexes can have a meaning if we do not define these only as mental processes. So, for example, a complex could involve a certain pattern of relations in a given situation – like someone sitting in my seat on a train – which creates a configuration of feelings and emotions drawn from past relational patterns that dispose me to act in certain ways, such as – 'they're always getting at me', 'why does this always happen to me', 'they're looking down on me', 'I'll show them'. Alternatively, the complex could go like this – 'someone's in my seat, what do I do?', 'shall I ask them to move?', 'nah, there's lots of free seats in the carriage'. Although this is expressed in verbal terms, when in the immediate situation these responses may just be feelings, it does illustrate how a complex may play out in specific situations; a complex formed from a social situation and my relationship to it in terms of my own bodily disposition to feelings and thoughts stemming from past patterns of relationships in my biography.

Our control over a complex will depend on the unity and strength of a situation and also of our dispositions – the unity and strength of our feelings – within it. As Buytendijk (1965/1974) pointed out, in emotion we often feel as if we are at the mercy of an alien power, something we cannot control, and at times this is felt to be our body. So in instances of blushing or of panic in an examination, we are *overcome* by emotion as we lose poise, memory and control of our bodies and thoughts. This is a compulsion that is brought on by a particular situation – social clumsiness in front of others or an examination – that is not experienced as a physical disease, but is dis-ease in another sense: it is the *sign* of personal confusion and loss of poise. As Buytendijk says, 'what evokes the shyness or fear is a *sign*, emerging from the periphery in the field of encounter, from the *possibility* of bodily disorder and personal impotence', so that the bodily reaction confirms that 'the personal

e-motio was already indicated situationally' (Buytendijk, 1965/1974: 177, emphasis in original). Here, a complex emerges from the situation which is read as containing the possibility of the loss of poise, and the bodily disposition – 'a tentative sketch of our existence' (Buytendijk, 1965/1974: 179) towards that loss of control in such circumstances. The different reaction of individuals to the same situation is based on the different meanings it will have for them, depending on past biographical experiences. As Buytendijk points out, the physiological responses themselves have no purpose, such as the reddening face when we are blushing, yet they represent for the person the bodily, lived sense of the emotion-making situation.

For Buytendijk, though, 'being emotional' or becoming emotional always exists in the experience of being out of control, of being taken over by the situation in ways similar to the ones above. The fact that a feeling or emotion can completely overwhelm us and take us over, as in a panic attack or *falling* in love, challenges the idea that our consciousness of what happens to us is unified and continuous, along with the illusion that we are always in control and that our willpower is supreme. However, this is not the only way in which we experience feelings and emotions. There are situations in which we are conscious of what we are feeling in the moment and have the power to control it to some degree. As I said above, this may depend on the unity and strength of a situation and also the unity and strength of our dispositions in that situation, or it may depend on the nature of our relationship to the people and things in it and how they affect us. For example, if a boss at work is scathing about my capabilities and I'm about to give the job up anyway, I'm more likely to feel sanguine about this than if I desperately need or want the job – in which case I'm more likely to feel angry or upset. In some cases affect may become affectation, as when we show concern for the misfortune of someone we really do not know well. What I want to develop here, then, is the idea that there is a range of experiencing feeling and emotion, and that our control of these experiences will vary across a range, from being helplessly affected at one end to being very much in control and affecting the required responses at the other end.

Emotions and Relationships

Having defined many of the key terms I will be using throughout this book I now need to say something about what I mean when I refer to the term 'relationships', and thus to emotions as patterns of relationships. Kenneth Gergen has pioneered research in the relational context

of emotion, suggesting in a similar fashion to Bateson that ‘communities generate conventional modes of relating; patterns of action within these relationships are often given labels. Some forms of action – by current Western standards – are said to indicate emotions’ (Gergen, 1994: 222). Like me, Gergen claims that emotion is not a thing or a substance that exists separately from relationships; rather, he suggests that we perform emotion within relationships, a bit like actors perform emotions on stage. In particular cases, patterns of relationship can be viewed as *emotional scenarios*, which are informally scripted patterns of interchange. It is within such scenarios that individuals perform emotions, which are not under the control of the individual but are called for by the particular relationships in that scenario. To explain this, Gergen draws on research by Pearce and Cronen (1980), as well as on a study he completed with Linda Harris and Jack Lannamann, to show how domestic violence between couples is an unwanted repetitive pattern of hostility that escalates within relationships, ending in physical violence that was not the original intention of either of the parties. The view also emerged that under certain conditions, such as one party being excessively critical of the other, violence was more likely to occur even if it is not acceptable. What Gergen is pointing out, though, through these small examples, is that in certain scenarios a violent act is not the result of an emotional state contained within an individual, such as anger or rage, but that these emotions emerge as part of the relational scenario itself; in this case, mounting hostility and decreasing opportunities for conciliation. While options for transforming or altering the course of the emotional scenario are always possible once it is in play, these options are limited by cultural traditions which prescribe the possibilities for intelligible action.

However, there are limitations to the view of emotions as scripted performance, as I will show in Chapter 6. Although it is true that people do informally script their emotional scenarios in the context of current relationships, they also bring their own biographies and dispositions into the scenario or situation, as did the man and woman on the train in my earlier example. Perhaps these scenarios are best understood as the acting out of dispositions from the past as much as ‘performances’ created according to an unfolding script. So while I have great sympathy with the intent behind Gergen’s relational view of emotions, I have disagreements about the concepts he deploys to understand emotions in a relational context. Moreover, he does not define what he means by ‘relationships’, taking it for granted that we know what is meant by that term. There are personal relationships, like those Gergen refers to above, and wider social relations. I will come to this in a moment.

Briefly, I want to mention one other point on which I differ from Gergen, which is his rejection of ‘experience’ as being important in emotional life. Gergen rejects this term because he feels it is individualistic and detracts from the focus on relationships. However, if we follow John Dewey’s ideas about situations and the experiences within them, there is no need for this to be so, because the term ‘experience’ does not denote something purely subjective and private, but instead is taken to mean the interaction between a person and their environment, involving other people and objects. For Dewey, experience is therefore about activity and interaction in the world which is not primarily subjective, but is relational in that it is constituted in relations to others as well as to the whole context of one’s immediate situation. Thus, experience is a continually evolving process in which interactions are nested in dynamic relationships identifiable within particular situations (Dewey, 1934/1980). This is the definition of experience I will follow in this book and is the reason why the term figures so largely in what follows.

To return to the issue of relationships, what do I mean here when I talk about relationships and about emotions only appearing in particular relational contexts? I agree with Crossley (2011), that an understanding of relations has to be centred on *interaction*, which is to say primarily the interaction between people, or perhaps that between people and things, such as inanimate objects, or the interaction between people and other living creatures. In this sense, ‘a social relation is not an object, akin to a bridge, but rather a shifting state of play within a process of social interaction’ (Crossley, 2011: 28). This means that social relations are never static, remaining in the same state, but unfold over time in a process of continual change. They are dynamic, unpredictable and co-created, so that no one person is ever in complete control over the way the relation will evolve.

The relational approach I will develop here follows that of Emirbayer (1997) who argues that relational sociology *does not* see the social world as consisting primarily in substances or ‘things’ (the substantialist perspective) that constitute the fundamental units of enquiry; rather, the relational perspective understands the terms or units of enquiry (such as emotions) to derive their meaning, significance and identity from their location in social relations, the latter being conceived as dynamic, unfolding processes that are never completely finalised. It is these relations that are the primary unit of analysis rather than the constituent elements in themselves. Although Emirbayer calls this approach transactional, following Dewey and Bentley (1949), as opposed to interactional – the latter term being conceived in the substantialist terms of the interaction of static entities, similar to the Newtonian understanding of the causal interaction

between fixed entities in the universe – like Crossley I shall continue to use the term interaction here. This is partly because this is the familiar term in the social sciences, but also because by it I do not mean interaction in the Newtonian sense, rather in the relational sense used by the pragmatists (including Dewey in his early work). That is, interaction is a relational process that goes on between elements that are not understood to be independent at any point in the process, because each takes on their meaning and identity in relations: furthermore, their meaning and identity changes in relational processes. This is true of emotions, which, in the approach I am advocating here, are not substances but only come into existence and take on a meaning in relational processes between people. Likewise with human identities, that (as I will argue in Chapter 5) are not to be understood as fixed entities, but as polyphonic selves that take their form within and act upon complex, fluid, dialogical social relations.

In this sense relations can be understood as patterned figurations, just as Norbert Elias (1939/2000) conceives of figurations as being like a dance in which the patterned activity is created by the dancers acting in concert. While the dance cannot be independent of the dancers, it can be independent of *any particular dancer*, in that different styles of dancing are communicated and learned in a social process in which the dance style came to be a relatively enduring and recognisable pattern of movement through which individual dancers learned to dance. This is the way that dances spread, endure, multiply and are transformed, through myriad individual and collective variations of the practice. But the dance is also material because it is a practice that is dependent on embodied social learning; on the repositories of movement lodged in muscle memory that enable, with intense practice, the effortless flow from one body position to the next.¹ In a similar way, affective practices can spread through myriad social relations, conceived not as absolutely bounded entities, such as sealed off ‘societies’, but as relations between classes, groups and factions which are themselves not bounded entities; rather, they are multiple and intersecting networks of interactions and practices. These, too, rest on material and economic factors, as I will show in Chapter 2, that support different types of relationships and thus enable different types of affective practice. But this means that the emotional scenarios in which dramatic encounters occur are the relational settings in which wider cultural styles come into play, just as the setting on the train was infused by social class and gender relations – the different styles of masculinity and femininity, and the different bodily displays of status and social distinction that helped script the drama. Because networks of relations intersect and overlap, there is no way of separating the macro – the relations between classes, groups and factions – from the

micro – the face-to-face interactions of particular situations – that take place in the broader framework of social relations.

Perhaps social relations and the scenes of interaction can really only be understood as ‘a temporally embedded process of social engagement’, that is ‘informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented towards the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and towards the present (as a capacity to contextualise past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment)’ (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998: 963). As Raymond Williams (1977) commented in his essay on ‘structures of feeling’, culture and society seen as monolithic blocks are an expression of an habitual past tense, as fixed objective and explicit forms, whereas the present moment is more active, subjective and flexible as it moves towards a future which is not defined in absolute terms. The fixed forms of the past – society, culture, a dance – become active and part of practical consciousness ‘only when they are lived, actively, in real relationships, and moreover in relationships that are more than systematic exchanges between fixed units’ (Williams, 1977: 130). In the moment of active relations ‘we are concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt’, a process in which there is no distinction between thought and feeling in practical consciousness. Instead, in the moment of interaction there are ‘characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationship: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity’ (Williams, 1977: 132). Williams talks about these as *structures* of feeling because they are not mere flux; they are sensed as a pre-formation of new meanings, open to articulation when new semantic figures are created that can give them full expression. However, the important thing for us here is that in the present moment of interaction, feeling and thought are one and the same; they are part of practical consciousness which brings into play and experiences socially given meanings from the past, but is capable of creating new meanings in the present moment and as it imagines the future. I will explore these ideas in Chapter 3 as I further develop the aesthetic understanding of feeling and emotion.

As I said above, though, within these relations there are varying degrees of power, so that some may have more influence than others, meaning relationships are never completely harmonious. There are conflicts, tensions and rivalries in all relations to some degree or another, or at the very least there is the possibility for these to emerge. Once again, the example of the young man on the train serves to illustrate this, as the interaction between people from different social backgrounds and with very different

perceptions of the situation can lead to miscommunication and lack of attunement in emotional situations. What we also saw in this example is that particular situations in which people relate to each other and interact are intersected by wider social relations that stretch across societies, such as relations and conflicts between social classes and genders. This list could also include different ethnicities or religious groups that might affect the relationships between individuals in local contexts, depending on the perceptions, attitudes or prejudices of the particular people involved. Local contexts are influenced by the wider networks of social relations, but not in any over-determined way; in fact, as we will see in the next chapter, local contexts might provide a haven from wider relations of conflict. I will call these local contexts 'emotional situations' and locate them within the broader social relations within societies as a whole. I hope to illustrate this in the next chapter, which looks at the historical and cultural relations in which emotions develop and evolve. Before that I want to give a brief summary of what is to follow in each chapter of the book.

Chapter Summaries

The idea of emotions as patterns of relationship and of emotion as complex is threaded throughout what follows. In the next Chapter (2) I look at historical and anthropological evidence which suggests that emotion has changed as social relationships have changed, a view that goes against the idea that there are a number of 'basic emotions' which are universally found in all human societies and cultures. There is a vast amount of historical and anthropological work, some of it supporting the idea of universal emotion while other work emphasises its variability, to the extent that it is impossible to review all of this in one chapter. Instead, I focus on the history of romantic love as it emerged in western societies in the 12th century, suggesting that what we understand today as a natural, timeless emotion has a history stemming from a certain time and place when significant changes in social relations occurred which, in turn, supported new social practices that allowed the feelings to emerge that we associate with being in love. Similarly, I look at changes in the emotion we call aggressiveness throughout the Middle Ages in the west, and finish by looking at anthropological work done on the emotion of grief in a Brazilian shantytown. My purpose in this is to show how emotions are embedded in social relations and how emotion is a complex phenomenon that also involves the body and various feelings, not just the discursive understanding of emotion as it changes between historical periods and across different cultures.

This theme is then taken up in Chapter 3, which develops the aesthetic theory of feeling and emotion, in that they are seen to be at the centre of the bodily process of making and experiencing meaning. Here, I argue for the complex understanding of emotion, in which for emotional experience to occur there has to be both a bodily response to a particular situation fused with a mindful realisation of that experience as expressed in language, word meanings and metaphors. My argument is that we need to account for the whole of this complex phenomenon to understand how emotions are composed of different feelings, and, in turn, how these feelings occur. This leads me into a consideration of work in contemporary neuroscience in Chapter 4, in particular that of Antonio Damasio, who has attempted a neuroscientific understanding of emotion which also unites the mind and the body, something that is ignored by most other works in neuroscience. However, in my critique of Damasio, I find his work falls short of the complex view of the emotions I am aiming for, as it fails to understand the way emotions are created in social relations. Instead, a cognitive-behavioural model of emotions is adopted by this form of neuroscience which I find to be inadequate. I do, though, at the end of the chapter, look at work currently emerging in neuroscience which might be more adaptable to the kind of explanation of emotion I am developing here.

Some of these themes are continued in Chapter 5, as Damasio has attempted not only to challenge the dualism between body and mind in the study of emotion, but also the dualism between reason and emotion. I take this forward throughout this chapter, but in a very different way, drawing on the work of pragmatist thinkers like Dewey, Mead and Cooley, alongside the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. My argument here is that emotion is not something separate from what we call 'rational' thought but is integral to it, along with other factors like the imagination which we often hold in opposition to 'reason'. Furthermore the self, which is so central to emotional experience and is founded on feeling, is not understood in this approach as a cognitive phenomenon – a form of representation – but as a polyphonic and dialogic individual that takes shape in and acts upon complex, unfinished social relations and bodily interactions in particular situations. This works against current cognitive theories of affect that are being developed in psychology, which understand emotion and the self to be factors in the cognitive processing of information.

Chapter 6 changes gear again slightly to look at sociological work on the emotions, in particular studies of the 'emotional labour' of service workers, stemming from Arlie Russell Hochschild's seminal work which began the study of emotional labour and emotion work. While

this has been hugely influential in the social sciences and beyond, there has been little attention paid to the actual theory of emotion developed in the concept of emotional labour. In this chapter I take a critical view of Hochschild's concepts, such as emotional labour, emotion work and the feeling rules that govern emotional situations, going on to develop a different view of the way emotion and emotional life occurs, not just in work but in the whole of our lives, based on the relational and complex understanding of emotion I am advancing here. I then apply this to the way emotion is central to our working lives using a study of nursing practice in the NHS in Britain.

Finally, in Chapter 7 I study the role of emotion in power relations and in politics. I look at the way emotion has figured in theories of power and technologies of government, focusing on a case study of the popular protests against the impending Iraq war in 2003. My thesis here is that despite the attempts of those in power to govern emotions through instilling fear during the 'war on terror', this was not entirely possible as emotions among large populations of people are unpredictable in advance. I also conclude by drawing together the themes of the book, which are that emotion is a response to the way in which people are embedded in patterns of relationship, both to others and to significant social and political events or situations, and this has an individual, biographical element to it which depends on people's prior relational affiliations and values. Furthermore, while emotion emerges in social relations, these are constantly shifting and therefore emotion is open to continual change, because it is part of emergent relations. Emotions, then, both shape and are shaped by social relations as they shift and change over time.

Note

1. I would like to thank Jason Hughes for suggestions on the wording of this section.