The Affectiveness of Symbols

Materiality, Magicality, and the Limits of the Antisemiotic Turn

by Sasha Newell

Online enhancements: supplemental figures

In response to an oft-encountered stance against semiotic or symbolic analysis in current anthropological theory, I argue for a broader understanding of semiosis as inherently both affective and material. Affect theory and new materialism move away from conceptualizations of human subjectivity and cultural construction and toward an ontological framework focused on material entities and vital flows. By meshing their language with that of classic symbolic anthropology, I demonstrate how the materiality of symbols produces and transmits affect and that, indeed, the efficacy of ritual is based on the manipulation of affect. Rather than thinking of signs as delimited representations fixed in structures, I emphasize their indeterminacy and ambiguity as the source of their social efficacy. Drawing on my research on affectively charged material objects in the storage spaces of US homes, I demonstrate that the affective force of these things stems from their open-ended and often unrecognized chains of semiotic associations. Ultimately, I present semiotic affect as a way to return to theorizing the social as an intercorporeal force that precedes the conscious determination of the subject.

> *The sign is an encounter rather than an act of recognition. And it can only be felt or sensed: signs act directly on the nervous system.* (Marks 1998:38)

> *Matter can shimmer with undetermined potential and the weight of received meanings.* (Stewart 2007:23)

Affect, often described as asemiotic and "unassimilable" (Massumi 1995:88), now has its own keyboard. In this age of mobile communication, texts are becoming passé, according to the *New York Times* (Isaac 2015). Many mobile users pass up mere texting or even *emoji* in their mobile messages, employing instead a new "third language": GIFs. Facebook, which included GIF functionality only in March of 2015, already reports the transmission of more than five million of these animations daily. A GIF, which stands for "graphic interchange format," is a brief animation or video loop, typically soundless and lasting only several seconds. Often the images are overlaid with subtitles conveying the words spoken in the clip or a brief message. Although the GIF is a technology almost as old as the internet itself, once combined with text messaging it constitutes a new mode of communication, for it is capable of effectively transmitting complicated emotive and experiential feelings that are difficult to describe in words. "Typing is an antiquated input method and you can't express emotional dimension adequately with just a handful of *emoji*. GIFs have trumped all of it" said Adam Leibsohn of Giphy, one of the web's primary GIF search engines; or as one youth interviewed put it, "I'm able to express these really complex emotions in the span of two seconds" (Isaac 2015). Tenor (formerly Riffsy), a GIF keyboard that can be incorporated into a smartphone keyboard in order to search for and post GIFs from inside any communication app, organizes the clips according to a variety of tags, but the most prominent are emotional reactions such as #clapping, #eyeroll, #shrug, #aww, #sad, #angry, #omg, #regret nothing, #whatever, #LOL, and #YOLO.[1] The category "angry" brings up images of a snarling Taylor Swift in an interview, a panda destroying an office, John Goodman's character Charlie Meadows from the film *Barton Fink*, and Gollum, among hundreds of other possibilities.[2] In fact, many GIFs are effective precisely because they are recognizable moments from popular culture that smuggle in their own narrative context for those in the know. Some tags signal the inability to convey the intensity of emotion in words, such as #fangirling, defined by UrbanDictionary.com's highest-rated entry as "the reaction a fangirl has to any mention or sighting of the object of her 'affection.' These reactions include shortness of breath, fainting, high-pitched noises, shaking, fierce head shaking as if in the midst of a seizure, wet panties, endless blog posts, etc." (https://www.urbandictionary.com).[3] Some GIFs can be much more abstract or polyvalent. Consider

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1. https://www.tenor.com/reactions (accessed on August 7, 2015).
2. https://www.tenor.com/search/angry.
3. https://www.tenor.com/search/fangirling. Considering the not-so-implicit sexism of the concept itself, "#fangirling," surprisingly seems to

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the communicative uses of a cat sleeping under rainbow-colored strobe lights[4] or a three-second clip from the final moments of the Korean film *Old Boy*, in which the protagonist stares with a mixture of sadness and happiness into the snow, having successfully erased his own memory of the revelation that the woman with whom he has just fallen in love is the daughter he lost when he was framed for killing his wife and imprisoned 15 years before.[5]

These are affective transmissions—conveyances of that slippery realm of sensation and reaction that cannot be put into words effectively, uncapturable by ordinary language (Brennan 2004). And yet GIFs are also signs. In Peircian terms they might be called iconized affect—in that they bear qualities that resemble the affective reaction they transmit (often facial expressions), allowing the recipient to recognize or even reproduce it without necessarily "understanding" it. These digital objects are constructed and designed precisely to be passed virally, to spread through mobile platforms and multiply across populations in the form of messages in the middle of conversations. The choices that go into their design often rely upon assumptions about how they will be understood. Yet just as smiles and yawns are often contagious, these film loops of affective qualities not only convey a "meaning" but often reproduce that affective sensation in the recipient. The existence of this "third language" should give us pause, since the affective turn seems most often to position semiosis and affect as opposites; for many, the very idea that signs and affect speak together (and to each other) would seem to contradict the very root of their distinction (Blackman 2012; Clough 2007; Gregg and Seigworth 2010; Hemmings 2005; Leys 2011; Martin 2013; Massumi 2002; Sedgwick 2003; Shouse 2005; Thrift 2008). Instead, like Navaro-Yashin (2012), I seek a middle ground that connects interiorities with external objects, materiality with spirit, cultural and nonhuman. I bring to her rich and subtle approach to affect theory an awareness of signs as precisely this kind of contradictory object that threads its existence along the cusp between subjectivity and externality. Bringing affect and semiotics together, I argue, gives us an improved understanding of both as the intertwined core of sociality itself.

Having already sent reverberations through much of cultural studies, affect theory is taking an uneven but increasingly potent hold on anthropology (Biehl and Locke 2010; Mazzarella 2009; McGrail, Davie-Kessler, and Guffin 2013; Middleton 2013; Navaro-Yashin 2012; Parreñas 2012; Riles and Rudnyckyj 2009; Rutherford 2012; Skoggard and Waterston 2015; Stewart 2007) and often meshes with other fashionable key words that index the turn against linguistic theory: posthumanism, the ontological turn, and new materialism (Latour 2005). Signs are often described in affect literature as cold, rational, defined, and transparent—above all the explicit products of the conscious determination to represent (Massumi 1995; Stewart 2007). By contrast, within Massumi's "asignifying philosophy" (1995:88), affects are corporeal apperceptions and reactions that do their work before conscious cognition even arrives upon the scene.[6] Affects are worth considering for anthropologists because they point toward not only the body's sensual reactions to and absorptions of the outside world but the forces that affect the self quite apart from subjective consciousness and intentionality. Unlike the often artificially constructed products of semiosis, affective processes are theorized as linked to the autonomic nervous system and inaccessible to consciousness—and therefore authentic and rooted in everyday material interactions. As various critics (Leys 2011; Martin 2013; Mazzarella 2009) have argued, because affects are often represented as outside social control, they are not infrequently romantically associated with freedom and revolution. Deleuzian affect does not so much exist within individual bodies but flows as resonant energy through the "assemblages" within which bodies are entangled (Biehl and Locke 2010; Hemmings 2005; Thrift 2008). Stewart's description is the most evocative: "Ordinary affects, then, are an animate circuit that conducts force and maps connections, routes, and disjunctures. . . . To attend to ordinary affects is to trace how the potency of forces lies in their immanence to things that are both flighty and hardwired, shifty and unsteady but palpable too" (2007:3). Affects thus exceed the corporeal, their vibrations animating geographic places, commodities, images, and sounds.

My argument here, contra the dominant vectors of affect theory, is that affective force can also be found lodged in signs and that this is actually the principal manner in which affect transmits between bodies. Furthermore, it is precisely this semiotic transmission of affect that allows the social to permeate the thinking of persons without their conscious awareness. Marx wrote that senses have their own historicity, making perception itself an object of cultural construction, but he

include almost as many images of men as women, as well as a significant percentage of nonhuman exemplars. An initial tally (including several guesses and images that have both genders) counts 24 images of women, 20 of men, and 3 of creatures whose gender is nonspecific. These observations about the gender distribution of the tag #fangirl are taken from the Riffsy GIF keyboard on August 7, 2015.

4. https://www.tenor.com/view/trippy-rainbow-cat-kitten-gif-3571234.

5. https://www.tenor.com/view/cold-winter-snow-freezing-gif-3530228.

6. The concept of affect I draw upon here comes from the Deleuzian tradition—and the work of Massumi (2002) has been especially influential in this regard. It is worth noting the existence of another tradition on affect stemming from psychologists such as Tompkins (1995) and Ekman (1992), who argue for a kind of primeval palette of six or nine or so universal affects (depending on the scholar). By contrast, the philosophical tradition on affect distinguishes affect from emotion, arguing that emotion is already culturally defined while affect is sheer preindividual "intensity" or "potential." In any case, Papoulias and Callard (2010), as well as Leys (2011), argue convincingly that these two versions of affect in effect overlap, as both versions turn to neuroscience as an authority on a self construed as primarily material, with consciousness reduced to an aftereffect of affect.

did not conceptualize the overlap between the senses and the production of "sense" as meaning or knowledge (Howes 2003). This entanglement between bodily and social processes is precisely what is at stake here. I must first describe what I mean here by "semiosis," because the word is itself a sign under contestation. I do not limit signs to words or visual icons but incorporate all sensory modes; all processes in which the perception of a material trace produces effects upon the perceiver are forms of semiosis, even when consciousness is not involved. Therefore, with Eduardo Kohn (2013) and Christopher Bracken (2007) I employ the Peircian conception of semiosis as entelechy (Peirce 1998 [1904]), as the process by which the potential is made actual: "Life is constitutively semiotic. That is, life is, through and through, the product of sign processes. . . . What differentiates life from the inanimate physical world is that life-forms represent the world in some way or another, and these representations are intrinsic to their being" (Kohn 2013:9). Even pure linguistic signs are not truly determinate—although dictionaries do their best to crystallize language and stop time—they live and vibrate in the tense space between, inside the constant and collective bricolage that recontextualizes and transforms a sign with its every use. Words have biographies.

Many semiotic processes happen unconsciously and bear little resemblance to the linguistic codes most frequently associated with signs. The classic Peircian example is smoke as an index for fire. Such a sign "asserts nothing"—it is not a code but a causal reaction indexically tied to real events, but it nevertheless communicates the event. In fact, a fire alarm (another Peircian example) is not only a sign of fire that must be interpreted but itself mechanically (yet still semiotically) triggered by smoke—a technological object designed to both read and emit signs. Indeed, in his later writing, Massumi himself invokes Peirce in just this way to discuss the way a body responds to a fire alarm that malfunctions and goes off without the presence of fire. The effect of the sign of a fire alarm is not the concept of fire: "[It] is the innervated flesh to which the sign performatively correlates 'fire,' existent or nonexistent. It is the nervous body astartle that is 'the object of the command' to alertness. That performance takes place wholly between the sign and the 'instinctively' activated body" (Massumi 2010:64). This originally Peircian example clearly indicates how signs interweave in material existence, in and out of consciousness and uncontainable by concepts of representation or subjectivity. In her work on affective transmission, the psychologist Teresa Brennan (2004) argues that North Atlantic cultures tend to overemphasize the visual as a mode of transmission because of a discomfort with other sensory modes of communication that more obviously threaten the boundaries of the body. In this vein, I consider touches, smells, and pheromones as key types of signs that carry affect between people but also the synesthetic resonance of material products such as buildings, spaces, artifacts, and commodities.

Since the crisis of representation in anthropology, cultural anthropologists seem to be increasingly suspicious not only of the culture concept itself but of all things ideational. Inspired by the monism of Spinoza and Deleuze (Biehl and Locke 2010) on the one hand and the monadology of De Tarde and Latour on the other (Latour 2014), anthropologists have turned increasingly toward "hard sciences," such as biology and neuroscience, and the invocation of "the real" seems progressively devoid of communicative activity, signals, and "meaning" (whatever that most troublesome of words actually means). Despite its etymological roots, anthropology is no longer the study of humans, as the quest to break down the most entrenched binaries of modernist thinking expands our understanding of social interaction to include animals and microorganisms (Haraway 2008; Kohn 2013; Viveiros de Castro 1998) as well as tools, technologies, and artifacts (Bennett 2010; Gell 1998; Haraway 1991; Harman 2011; Holbraad 2011; Latour 2005; Miller 2005; Santos-Granero 2009) and, more recently, spirits (Blanes and Espírito Santo 2014; Johnson 2014). All of these nonhuman beings are animate entities in their own right, divorced from previous social theory that wrote them off as idioms or representations. At the same time, the Deleuzian wave in anthropology, recently heralded by Biehl and Locke (2010) as the "anthropology of becoming," searches for a preindividual space of affective trajectories meshing between material worlds and sociality, producing consciousness itself as an epiphenomenon. For many, this is a rejection not only of social determinism but even of individual will as a central motivating factor driving action; rather, agency is located in the assemblage, the in-between. I embrace much of this boundary-defying activity, but I reject its rejections; to exclude the symbolic from social analysis is to fall prey to the very Cartesian dualism these scholars and cultural critics claim to be denouncing, now purifying the material of any taint of consciousness. If tools and bacteria are included in the social, then signs are people too.

If we are truly to overcome mind-body dualism, we must be able to trace both the way signs affect the body and how the body affects semiosis, producing recursive feedback loops Massumi posited but never quite explored in his seminal article on affect (1995:86–87, 91). By bringing together neovitalist understandings of affect and the indeterminacy of vibrant matter with insights from classical symbolic anthropology, I hope to implicate the efficacy of signs within the sociality of affect (and vice versa). In the end, I suggest that it is through a return to the primacy of the social (but now through a posthumanist lens) that anthropology can respond to current philosophical orientations while holding onto its disciplinary strengths and proclivities.

Storage Space: Materialized Affect and the Spirit of Things

My approach to these theoretical topics emerged as I struggled to make sense of an ethnographic puzzle in my ongoing research into storage space and accumulation in the United States—especially behaviors related to those characterized as

"hoarding disorder." I conducted fieldwork on this topic primarily through home-oriented interviews conducted in 2007 in central Illinois and in 2011 in the "Triangle" region of North Carolina, but I have also been tracking these themes in my own family life and popular culture for over 10 years. Because of the limitations of personal narratives, my interviews are usually conducted through home tours that analyzed both public and private objects as we exposed and excavated storage spaces, and as often as possible I did participant observation with people organizing and purging storage, conducting yard sales, moving, packing, and unpacking (see the supplemental PDF, available online). However, although I draw upon several ethnographic anecdotes as well as some more generalized insights drawn from my field observations to elucidate the overall argument, my primary focus in this article is to suggest a juncture between branches of anthropological thought that are at present typically sequestered from one another.[7] Thus, the ethnographic content presented here is intended to illustrate my arguments rather than prove them. Just as storage space helped me to enter and understand these problems, I hope that I can use it to highlight the ways in which materiality, affect, and semiosis intermesh in everyday life.

Every home has some form of storage, and most set aside vast reserves of such private space, equal to or greater than the inhabitable square footage of the home, space never meant to be seen by guests and much of it outside the purview of the inhabitants' daily patterns of movement in the home. As such, it becomes an invisible ghostly double and, perhaps more importantly, a space of liminality, a place in which to put all those "betwixt and between" things that do not readily fit into comfortably assigned categories of use or value. It is this liminality that attracts children's fantasy and teenage reclusivity, as exemplified by Barbara's memories:

> The attic when I was a kid, you know, there were steps going up and winding around, but I liked to go up there. I mean I remember this particularly maudlin phase when I was in high school where I'd just go hang in the attic, you know, like ah I hate my life and no one understands me and I'm going to hang out in the attic.

But in the context of affect theory, one might think of this heterotopic space as set apart from conscious determination, a space where representational meaning is temporarily suspended, allowing for the emergence of paradoxical and nonsensical combinations of things normally kept apart and in binary tension. Turner (1967) writes of the monsters that populate rites of passage and provide models for critical thinking about fixed cultural oppositions, and indeed quite often we populate storage space with Latourian monsters—entities that defy categorization in terms of our basic dichotomies between nature and culture, matter and spirit, object and subject. As an example, one of the most common and least sensible things stored in my research experience are broken electronic devices: old radios, record players, and increasingly computers and their attendant outmoded apparati—floppy disks, cables, and adapters that no longer fit anything—husks of former life kept as though in cryogenesis for some future in which they might be repaired. As a Toni, a sardonic woman in her 80s told me, "The first thing to know about attics is that they are filled up because they are there." It is the space that comes first, an architectural category that itself seems to be in a process of collective expansion, as walk-in closets become a must-have of real estate and the 48,500 rented storage units in the United States take up 2.5 billion square feet, or more than 89 square miles, under roof (2015–16 Self Storage Association Industry Fact Sheet).[8]

Entering storage is first of all a space of encounter with materiality qua materiality. As anyone who has tried to sort through the contents of an attic or garage or basement (especially the belongings of a loved one) will know, the weight, the mass, the volume of things is immediately apparent. As the nostrils fill with dust, as one attempts to disentangle the collectible valuables from the sentimental treasures from the abject refuse that seems to proliferate in every crevice of stored things, the material qualities of these things strike the tactile and olfactory senses—a haptic assault. No matter how clean the house, the stuff of storage leaves a film on one's hands and clings to one's clothes. The effect is not only emotionally but also physically draining, as though the objects themselves were absorbing life force from persons that come in contact with them. But these objects are not reducible to their materiality either. Seeing them, touching them, smelling them, such sensual contact triggers against one's will memories, former emotional states, imagined futures, and alter-pasts like fireworks bursting from nerve endings into untold portions of the brain that normally go unnoticed. I have found that merely talking with people about the things they have in storage, without even entering that space and confronting the objects, can evoke tears, joyful reverie, tense frustration, or, most likely, a confused mix of unqualifiable affects that neither they nor I could capture adequately in words.

A dean at a prominent northeastern university burst into tears at the mere thought of her grandfather's hat during an interview, followed by 30 minutes of narrative justifications. And yes, spontaneous narratives also emerged from encounters between people and their stored possessions, as though the objects were bulging with experiential memories and accompanying narrative sequences, as though they were containers that burst open upon contact with the senses. Indeed, it is precisely in their relationship to memory that the material tangibility and magically evocative potentialities of the object come to the fore.

7. Exceptions do exist. See especially Hemmings (2005), Leys (2011), Mazzarella (2009), and Navaro-Yashin (2009).

8. http://www.selfstorage.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=fJYAow6_AU0%3D&portalid=0 (accessed on July 30, 2016).

The liveliness of matter becomes uncomfortably clear in the face of personal possessions in storage, which refuse to behave like proper objects resting in their designated places but rather accumulate and shift and spill without our bidding.[9] In public, people usually only joke about such things or whisper about the activities of others, but when faced with their own storage spaces or when the need to change residence brings about an encounter with the totality of one's things, the illusion of a rational mastery over mere things crumbles under the weight of matter, and humans are forced to admit it is they who are subject to the agency of the possessions that possess them. Indeed, my interviewees often expressed frustration and embarrassment at their inability to articulate why they were compelled to hold onto many of the things they kept in storage, indicating an affective range of mental activity walled off from their rationalist self-representation. Melanie, a middle-aged musician and self-employed accounting consultant, lived in a house whose common rooms had been filled with boxes of her mother's possessions. Still, Melanie acknowledged the irrationality of her own relationship to material possessions:

> My collection of toy horses from the time I was a little girl? It's not large, but it's in a box in the attic. That can't leave. Every time I open that box thinking "I can give these to some kid," I realize I can't do it. So I do understand where my mother was coming from with stuff.

She discussed the burden of having to not only sort through her mother's things but also follow her detailed instructions about who should keep each object and peruse her records of the origins and importance of many of her collections. Yet she understood her mother because she herself felt the same tug from things she knew she ought to remove from storage so they would not be a burden to others later.

The horses in question were kept in a box in a crawl space that could be accessed only by passing through a part of the house she rented out, so these were not objects she saw regularly, and yet the horses emerged of their own accord in conversation—even in their physical absence they were present, weighing on her mind when the topic of excess stuff was in question. The matter of these toy horses matters. She has to keep the actual objects, not simply the memory of them or a photo of them (though this technique, promoted by professional organizers and self-help books, was brought up by a few people I spoke with as a plan to purge their stuff). But it is clearly not only the materiality that matters but the memories they represent.

But memory is itself is a rather sticky substance. The key question for new materialists is whether or not memory is purely material. As ephemeral as affect theory may seem, it is important to remember that it is a corporeal infolding of the sensual that is meant to operate outside of cultural schemas and even consciousness itself. Massumi's article on affect argues that "the body doesn't just absorb pulses or discrete stimulations, it infolds *contexts*. . . . Intensity is asocial, not presocial—it *includes* social elements" (1995:90–91). The trick for Massumi, since he wants to preserve a gap between the semiotic and the affective, is that this can happen "only if the *trace* of past actions *including a trace of their contexts* were conserved in the brain and in the flesh, but out of mind and out of body understood as qualifiable interiorities, active and passive respectively, directive spirit and dumb matter" (1995:91).

However, Ricoeur's theory of memory criticizes the neuroscience position that claims that we will eventually understand memory through a complete taxonomy of the brain, assuming that memories are simply imprints upon our gelatinous matter waiting for future decoding (Ricoeur 2004). While cortical traces trigger memory, there is no way for a memory to at once reference the past and exist purely through materiality, for "the material trace is completely present and must be supplied with a semiotic dimension in order to indicate that it has to do with the past" (Ricoeur 2004:432–433). In fact, a good deal of the affect the horse contains is produced by its semiotic content—not clearly constructed or coded messages but ill-defined associations with partial but conscious recollections of past experience. Or perhaps a more transparent way to say this is that much of a stored object's semiotic capacity is affect itself: not the pinning down of representation but the opening of represence—the partial return of the past into the present.

Gilles, a French expat who owns a small café in his small southern city's downtown, had a rare self-consciousness about his relationship to things—possibly because he had left so many things behind in the process of moving to the United States. He was a collector, especially of paintings, but also of Coca-Cola bottles and a variety of other things, including apartments in France, of which he had three. When his business was failing he sold his house, which he loved, for cash but kept all three apartments. He had made his kitchen counter out of the wood flooring of an old basketball gymnasium. His relationship to his possessions had become particularly acute with the loss of his parents and weakening of his connection to France.

> I've got all the things—we talked about the little object that I used to carry when I was a little boy in my pocket. I got a couple of dogs and a little penguin. They're on my shelf. I mean they're so worn and I used to suck them so they kind of lost their color. But I mean that thing is worth absolutely nothing. I mean there's no value whatsoever in it. Except just tactile memory of having it in my pocket. And every time I take it, you know, when I touch it, I go back to five years old, you know. . . . They don't change. I age but they

9. One might think that the compulsion these objects evoke is simply an echo of their former irrational work as commodity fetishes, but here their power is an inversion of the classic Marxian denial of personhood. As I have written about elsewhere, these objects are often valued because of the people, places, and times of which they were once a part (Newell 2014).

> don't change and it's very comforting I think to have something that you can go back to and revisit, you know . . . anyway, so my objects are kind of part of my history, you know, to some extent my family. So I'm very attached to them. But I don't look at them all the time. I mean just—but just knowing that they are there, it's sufficient I think.

This haptic quality of memory is important—and Kilroy-Marac's research on professional organizers reinforces this, as her informants tell her that when they are trying to get clients to agree to throw something away, they never allow them to touch the object—for the attachment becomes too vivid (Kilroy-Marac 2016:449). To touch is to participate.

My experiences in storage space thus speak to affect theory precisely because the effects of stored objects seem to take place "out of mind." Storage space is outside of social control, outside of consciousness, outside of presence. This seems related to its animacy, to the way these objects seem to act of their own accord and even control our behavior. Much as Durkheim described the birth of religion in the feeling of the social activating its affective force upon our "soul," objects pull on our interiority in ways we cannot consciously come to terms with. As a mathematics professor I interviewed put it, "Stuff, as in the tyranny of, . . . once it gets its hooks in you it's hard, you know?" These object-entities seem to act like parasites, anesthetizing their point of attachment so as to render themselves imperceptible to the conscious self while clinging to our social being and refusing to be shed as abject refuse. Once identified as parts of the self, they live on in the nooks and crannies of our physical space, often nearly undetected.

Stewart captures this dynamic in *Ordinary Affects:* "The potential stored in ordinary things is a network of transfers and relays. Fleeting and amorphous, it lives as a residue or resonance in an emergent assemblage of disparate forms and realms of life. Yet it can be as palpable as a physical trace" (2007:21). Things themselves store up affect, and when released, the charge can have physiological, psychological, and social repercussions. Many contemporary anthropologists, Stewart included, approach this realm of materiality and affect in terms of a nonrepresentational realm of potentiality, corporeal affect, and the agency of objects, a world in which linear narrative and symbolic interpretation often have no place. In presenting my research to anthropologists, I have found that invariably someone in the audience challenges the importance of semiosis in understanding stored and hoarded things, instead arguing that the agency and efficacy of things stem from their sheer materiality, devoid of cultural meaning. I follow the call to bring the sensual, the nonhuman, the tangible, the inarticulate, and the corporeal into anthropology (though I would argue that anthropology's strength as a discipline is that these have always been there somewhere), but many anthropologists these days seem interested in the culture-free aspect of materiality to the exclusion of its cultural entanglement. It is to this (to me) puzzling reaction that my argument is addressed, and in coming to terms with the origins of this pattern of reactions, I have come to think that it signals an important opportunity to rediscover the ways in which the forces of sociality imbricate with our subjectivities through our very pores and synapses.

Neovitalism, New Materialism, and the Untimely Death of Signs

Critics of the semiotic perspective seem to primarily protest its nominalism—its purported reliance upon concepts of coding, defining, taxonomizing, and generally ordering the world into neat little boxes. The new materialists cast such codifying procedures as the reduction of worldly complexities and causal networks to ideational procedures of classification. Often this perspective gets mixed up with a critique of ethnocentrism: the projection of Western scientific concerns with ordered clarity and rationality onto peoples with divergent ontologies and more pragmatic preoccupations—as though Lévi-Strauss had never written *La Pensée Sauvage* to debunk the idea that Others categorize less than Moderns. The new vitalists, on the other hand, fault semiotics with sucking the vibrant contradictory trajectories of movement from reality and replacing them with dead categories that bear little resemblance to the world or social life within it. To cite Massumi,

> Signifying subject formation according to the dominant structure was often thought of in terms of "coding." Coding in turn came to be thought of in terms of positioning on a grid. The grid was conceived as an oppositional framework of culturally constructed significations: male versus female, black versus white, gay versus straight, and so on. A body corresponded to a "site" on the grid defined by an overlapping of one term from each pair. The body came to be defined by its pinning to the grid. (Massumi 2002:2)

There is a strong tendency in this literature to equate signs and their interpretation with death. Stewart, for example, opposes the potentiality and dynamism of affects to "'obvious meaning' of semantic message and symbolic signification" or "orders of representations" (2007:3). Writing in her opening pages against "totalized systems," she suggests that the forces such systems attempt to describe are real but that she wants to examine them as "a scene of immanent force, rather than leave them looking like dead effects imposed on an innocent world" (Stewart 2007:1). The idea seems to be that fixation, closure, or "capture" brings about the death of vibrant resonance that social life is actually made up of: "If there were no escape, no excess or remainder, no fade-out to infinity, the universe would be without potential, pure entropy, death" (Massumi 2002:35). Thus, Mazzarella writes, "Massumi's work, like so much that is written in the neo-vitalist vein, also quivers with the romance of a fundamental opposition between, on the one hand, the productive, the multiple, and the mobile, and on the other, the death-dealing certitudes of formal determination" (Mazzarella 2009:293–294). Of course, examples of soul-killing semiotic analysis do litter the literature, but surely this must be blamed on the authors rather than the semiotic processes they delineate. I hope that,

rather than collecting examples of dead signs, we can attune ourselves to the vitality and materiality of semiosis as process and recognize the ontological existence of signs as animate actors within social life everywhere.

There is a sometimes a strange circularity in the efforts of new materialism to "emancipate" the thing from its status as mere representation (Holbraad 2011). Gell's (1998) argument for the agency of objects as extensions of human intentionality does not satisfy the Latourian who wants to give objects agency quite apart from their culturally constructed meaning. Instead, networks of "actants" displace agency from persons onto hybrid assemblages of materiality and the human, producing concatenations of matter with culture, or "naturecultures." Yet even as they claim to challenge the opposition between subject and object, many contemporary scholars seem to draw away from the slightest implication of human influence within things, seeking more purified material forms of activity and effect. For example, Holbraad critiques Latour for not being materialist enough because he grants objects agency only insofar as they are entangled with assemblages that include humans. In the line of speculative realists and Harman's object-oriented ontology, Holbraad courageously seeks to grant objects existence independent of human interaction without giving up an ethnographic lens. Nevertheless, when Holbraad asks us to accept not only that concepts are things but also that things are actually concepts, does this not also return us to ideation even as we are promised access to materiality itself (Holbraad 2011:12)? Rather than negating ideation, can we not seek its imbrication with materiality? This is perhaps what Holbraad is after in the end anyway—how things themselves think.

As Adorno wrote, the thing recedes before our gaze the more we try to capture its image conceptually (2007 [1966] :53); it cannot be contemplated directly, but only in its human refractions. Adorno is not hopelessly reiterating Kantian subjectivity here but rather pointing toward an awareness of object primacy through something like the mimetic faculty of Lévy-Bruhlian participation. It is when signs participate in the objects they represent, when the boundaries between representation and object are confused, that we come closer to awareness of objects outside our culturally delimited perception of them. As Bennett puts it, "Adorno reminds us that humans can experience the out-side only indirectly, only through vague, aporetic, or unstable images and impressions" (2010:17). Mind the gaps.

Ultimately, then, the real object appears only in the indeterminate spaces of unsettled perceptions—precisely the space, as I explore below, where the sensual materiality of signs produces affective response: the space of mimesis and magic. Holbraad asks, "Can the thing speak?" and searches for a material language of things, but Holbraad's insight was prefigured by Benjamin, who wrote that all objects have a mental being that is the "language" of that object: "Language is thus the mental being of things. . . . They can communicate to one another only through a more or less material community. This community is immediate and infinite, like every linguistic communication; it is magical (for there is also a magic of matter)" (1996:66–67). Bracken argues that the original German *geistige Wesen* can be read not only as "mental being" but also as carrying "a kind of ghostly surplus, the notion of 'spirit-being'"; things are "full of soul" (Bracken 2007:138–139). In fact, Benjamin's writing on language points us toward a theory of signs more compatible with the current anthropological moment, where "there is no such thing as a content of language" but rather the "mental being" of things communicated through "immediacy" (Benjamin 1996:64–66). This is a theory of language based on its materiality and a recognition that such materiality reaches beyond human consciousness while remaining semiotic and communicable.

Neovitalist affect theory discovers agency within and between bodies rather than in the mind or will. What gives affect a counterintuitive potency for anthropologists is the way it resists explanation in terms of subjective consciousness or social construction and yet lives in the interstices between bodies (Mazzarella 2009) and even between things (Bennett 2010; Stewart 2007). Brennan (2004) argues that smells and pheromones are crucial avenues through which affect is socially transmitted—actually chemically penetrating one another's bodies and, through them, our minds. Affect is not yet emotion—that happens once the consciousness gets ahold of it and classifies the sensation. The anthropology of emotion has long suggested as much; in Lutz's work emotions may derive from a place that is precultural, but in our awareness they are categorized, edited, and sculpted so as to fit particular cultural constructions (Lutz 1988); affect theory merely shifts the focus of analysis to the precultural autonomic response from which our concepts of emotions derive (see also Skoggard and Waterston 2015). Massumi describes affect as experience of unqualified intensity that cannot be fully captured by society, structure, or mind: "Intensity is the unassimilable" (1995:88). Citing neurological studies that demonstrate a half-second delay between a body's autonomic reaction to an external stimulus and conscious awareness of it, both Massumi and Thrift (the architect of "nonrepresentational theory") write about the body as "matter in motion," where the real action, including decision making itself, takes place before the subjective consciousness gets around to justifying the choice its body has already made (Massumi 1995:90; Thrift 2008:186).

Martin's (2013) wonderful takedown of affect theory has already shed quite a bit of doubt upon the mid-eighties neurological science behind Massumi's claims, so I do not delve into the experiments themselves here. However, the general model he proposes, of the body receiving and processing sensation separately in the autonomic nervous system before consciousness gets ahold of it, actually meshes well with preexisting anthropological arguments of scholars such as Jackson (1983), Scheper-Hughes and Locke (1987), and Csordas (1993), who have drawn from the phenomenology of perception to think about the kinds of knowledge that bodies produce and manage and how these work differently than explicit structures of mental classification. Thrift makes much of Lakoff

and Johnson's claim that at least "95 percent of all thought" is unconscious and that this vast unconsciousness shapes and structures consciousness like a "hidden hand" that emerges directly from the body's sensory apparatus (Thrift 2008:62). Performing a function very much like that which Douglas (1966:44–45) and Whorf (1956:210–213) give to unconscious classificatory schemes, the autonomous nervous system works as a kind of reductive or eliminative filter that narrows the overwhelming richness of sensation and signals stemming from the countless multiplicity of nerve endings to something that is relevant and comprehensible to our meager consciousness. Thus, the supposed "half-second" preconscious process of reaction and reduction is a space of potential and contradiction, in which multiple possibilities almost emerge before being reduced to the choice of which we become conscious:

> The virtual, the pressing crowd of incipiencies and tendencies, is a realm of *potential*. . . . a lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect; where what cannot be experienced cannot but be felt—albeit reduced and contained. For out of the pressing crowd an individual action or expression *will* emerge and be registered consciously. (Massumi 1995:91)

There is a kind of processual black box that we cannot trace phenomenologically, through which the excess of sensual awareness and corporeal reaction emerges in consciousness as so many delimited objects and options.

This model allows us to think about the kinds of intuitive leaps and realizations humans are able to arrive at without being able to trace the steps of their sensory awareness or calculations. But I am more interested here in the connection to classical anthropological theory, for this model helps us to understand the efficacy of ritual liminality as a phase that breaks down the walls between affect and consciousness and holds actors temporarily in the space of virtuality. Massumi's "virtual" can also be hinged to Tambiah's (1990) recycling of Lévy-Bruhl's "law of participation" as a cognitive mode that coexists with that of causality even as it operates in contradiction to it. If so, magical thinking is indeed human thinking, but much of it takes place at a level of thought that we sense without actually knowing.

Perhaps one of the most seductive characteristics of affect theory stems from its focus on potential, the open-ended trajectories of vital energy unconstrained by social norms, ideologies, categories, or grammatical rules. However, the unsavory corollary to the magical possibilities of potential is a sneaky return of the split between mind and body. As Martin writes, "it is the unformed, precognitive aspects of the lower level of the affects that make them seem filled with potential. This move separates intentionality or meaning from affect and assumes that intentionality and meaning are purely mental or cognitive" (2013:S155). Just as new materialists end up recreating the spirit-matter opposition they oppose by refusing any introduction of human influence within matter, Leys (2011) demonstrates that affect theorists end up reinvoking the mind-body distinction by making cognition a mere aftershock of purely bodily processes. At its most extreme, both Martin and Leys argue, affect theory often implies biological essentialism.

I believe that, by reconnecting the space of affect to living and indeterminate semiotic processes, we can preserve the magicality of affect and the corporeal qualities of ritual efficacy without reverting to sociobiology. This is not an advocation of a return to culture theory per se but rather an awareness of the dialectical interconnections between corporeal sense-signal reception and social transmissions of representation.[10]

Hauntings: The Autonomy of Affective Things

The juncture between neovitalist perspectives and new materialism is neatly synthesized by Bennett's concept of "impersonal affect" as "the catalyst itself as it exists in nonhuman bodies. This power is not transpersonal or intersubjective but impersonal, an affect intrinsic to forms that cannot be imagined (even ideally) as persons" (2010:xii). Thus, Bennett extends the idea of affects as forces in the body to forces at play between bodies of matter, many of them entirely inhuman: life (unstructured, disordered) extends into all things. Perhaps this makes even more sense if we eliminate the distinction between persons and things that Bennett clings to above and instead think of personhood itself as an agglomeration of material traces and objects imbued with character. Gell inverts Strathern's use of "partible person" to think of "distributed objects,"

> a dispersed category of material objects, traces, and leavings, which can be attributed to a person and which, in aggregate, testify to agency and patienthood during a biographical career which may, indeed, prolong itself well after biological death. The person is thus understood as the sum total of the indexes. (Gell 1998:222)

A person in this sense is neither body nor mind but a series of relationships construed semiotically. But while Gell is interested in thinking about the extension of intentionality into artwork, my research into storage practices has highlighted the way these material traces take on unintended agencies that often impinge on other people they encounter—for such "biographical objects" (Hoskins 1998) are often passed from person to person, abandoned, and found by others, and while their pasts are not legible codes, they are affectively present even to new owners.

Miller has written of haunted houses as the effect of the "discrepancy between the longevity of homes and the relative transience of their occupants. In consequence, feelings of alienation may arise between the occupants and both their

10. The emergence of the field of biosemiotics over the past decade indicates that such a meshing between materiality, vitality, and meaning is conceivable.

homes and their possessions" (2001:107). Haunting is all the more powerful because new owners know that there is a past and may even know or detect some fragments of it, but its contents remain largely a mystery. It is that unknown that gives the objects greater life. For some, the possibilities are horrifying and cannot be accommodated in the home, while others thrive upon the imaginative potential, find company in the implied presence of others within the object.

Gillian and Michael were a newly engaged couple in their early twenties who exemplified a Benjaminian relationship with objects that communicate flashes of unknown pasts. Michael was a musician and a collector of guitars. It seemed that most of his money and energy went in this direction, and he even had a spreadsheet detailing the contents of his musical equipment. Gillian was an artist with an affection for second-hand goods that tended toward the morbid side. She collected old postcards, particularly those with writing on them, and her favorite had been written from a hospital bed in Pittsburgh but never sent. One of the couple's most prized possessions was a portrait of a middle-aged woman with "eyes that followed you about the house." They both participated in discussing the mystery of the context of how, when, and why the portrait had been made—it was this mystery that gave the portrait power. The couple had recently settled into his grandmother's brother's bungalow, shortly after the latter's death. The following transcribed conversation has been slightly edited to cut down on length.

Michael: I didn't know him that well, to be honest. I mean, I'd see him at grandma's house, but as far as *knowing* him? Didn't know much at all. I knew they called him Barrel, because apparently he was fat when he was younger. He was about 6′5″. He was a big guy—wore like a humongous shoe. But we cleaned out this entire house, to move into it.

Gillian: Just the two of us.

Michael: Every closet was stacked full to the brim of stuff. We went through everything.

Gillian: His whole life.

Michael: Every picture—everything. And we learned so much about him.

Gillian: Found a lot of special things—I mean, that whole closet there is just full of his stuff that we don't have a place for but want to keep. . . . But I feel like that really made me aware of—I mean, Barrel never thought that . . . Michael and his girlfriend would be the people going through his life. And so who is going to go through mine?

Michael: Apparently he loved all of his coffee mugs, and he has all these ones with his friends on them, the American Legion. Just stuff like that where we're like, we can't get rid of this—it's too cool! You know what I mean? And Memaw wouldn't let us get rid of a lot of this stuff. Like, it's her brother's—she's going to hold onto that.

Gillian: And Western books—we have all his old books. We have two bookcases in the bedroom just full of his books. We haven't touched them. I made them color coded, but . . .

Michael: And his wedding band—she's already gotten it resized to be my wedding band. . . . But yeah, like all of his stuff—we were the ones to experience his entire life in a way that no one else did. Because we didn't know him first-hand, it was all second-hand.

Author: And it really connected you to him in an intimate way.

Gillian: Through the objects.

Michael: Through objects, through pictures, through rings . . .

Gillian: I feel like I have—I only met him maybe 5 or 6 times, but I feel like I have a really good understanding of who he was and how he was. What kind of person he was.

Michael: When I think about it, it's like this house is a whole project in its own. Because neighbors come by who knew him for the 50 years he lived here, and they'll say, "Oh the house looks so good." You know, they see it differently.

Gillian: And they'll say "Oh, Barrel would have liked the way you . . . did the flowers. He was really particular about his yard." And Madeline always liked to keep things just so, and that like she would only give you half a paper towel when you came over.

Michael: She was kind of thrifty—like she would vacuum the floors every single morning before she left for work—that kind of stuff.

Gillian: And so when I vacuum, I think about her! And when I'm doing things around the house, I think about her, and I'm like . . . it feels like she's here.

In moving into this space already wholly occupied by the possessions of another, Gillian and Michael preserved the former couple's memory through photographs and possessions lovingly rearranged throughout the house and were even reusing his wedding ring in their own marriage. Feeling that they had come to know the previous tenants by communicating with the material objects themselves, they cohabited not only with Barrel and Madeline's things but also with the ghostly presence of the former inhabitants. Objects here are material presences that arrest the senses, "sensuous signs," to use Deleuze's terminology (1972 [1964]:166).[11] Navaro-Yashin writes that a ghost "is what is retained in material objects and the physical environment in the aftermath of the disappearance of the humans linked or associated with that thing or space. In other words, rather than being a representation of something or someone else, the ghost is a thing, the material object, in itself" (2012:17).

But just as the tactile sensuality and affective capacities of these things are essential to their compulsive power, it is also not simply their materiality that is at stake; it is more than anything their evocative power to project the people who once possessed them. As Gordon writes, "haunting is a very particular way of knowing" that "draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition" (Gordon 2008:8). That represencing of absence, so vital to Gordon's project, must nevertheless be understood as semiotic, in that it is traces of the past that signal recall its image into present consciousness. This is not the defined knowledge of representational thinking, but an open awareness of something to be known, a recognition of absence.

Navaro-Yashin's fascinating project on postwar Cyprus, where Turkish Cypriots fleeing the south were moved into Greek Cypriots' houses in the north, discusses similarly haunting kinds of affective materiality in the midst of the possessions of others. The newly arrived refugees described looting from amid the family photos and memorabilia left behind by other families and living for decades among these objects plucked from their social contexts. "Here, there is a world of the imagination which is triggered . . . of how members of the other community might have lived in that house before the war, sitting on that sofa, cooking lunch in that kitchen, and picking olives in those fields" (Navaro-Yashin 2009:2). In responding to these objects that are kept despite the haunting discomfort of their presence, Navaro-Yashin argues that anthropologists must abandon the divisive discourse of both the affective and materialist turns, which in the name of progress cut us off from our own intellectual legacies. Ruins, she says, have both historical rootedness and rhyzomatic debris (2009:14)—and I would say that the same is true for the accumulated detritus of storage. Navaro-Yashin writes of knowledge production as a process of "ruination" that leaves the debris of past paradigms behind it. In that spirit, I want to draw on the venerable anthropological "ruin" of Turnerian symbolic anthropology in order to think through the affective quality of symbols.

The Effectiveness of Symbols: Redux

Far from presenting a wild biological frontier beyond reach of the symbolic, the causal force of affect to produce corporeal and cognitive reaction helps us to understand why symbols have efficacy, why they too are "actants" entangled within our social worlds. We should be looking at signs as a vital part of the materialized social world, at the core of intersubjective communications among not only humans but that whole meshwork of things, animals, and spirits that populate our worlds. This is actually a Deleuzian perspective, perhaps surprisingly, given that he is sometimes invoked as a bulwark against the anthropological interest in "meaning." Deleuze and Guattari write, "A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:7). In fact, "semiotic chains of every nature are connected to very diverse modes of coding (biological, political, economic, etc.) that bring into play not only different regimes of signs but also states of things of differing status . . . it is not [possible] to make a radical break between regimes of signs and their objects" Deleuze and Guattari (1987:7).[12]

As Keane has argued, an oversimplified Saussurean model of language continues to delimit our understanding of semiotics (Keane 2003, 2005). All communicative acts must be mediated by materiality—physical traces that transfer signals between bodies. And as Saussure taught us, the very separation of signs from one another is based on the sensual distinctions of various things in the material world (be they the phonetic contrasts of sound vibrations or the color and texture of a piece of fruit). The material form of the sign is not merely a vehicle, but a participant within the creation of shared meaning. Keane thus uses the term "bundling" to discuss the unintended consequences of the material aspect of the sign, whose qualia always present a sensual excess beyond the intended meaning. Our uptake of signs is synesthetic, and the sensual qualities of the sign and its material context bear upon its interpretation. Keane (2005) argues that "signs are not the garb of meaning"—that the Saussurean model of a mental image as the spiritual content of a superficial material container leads many to associate signs purely with their coded meanings rather than their pragmatic use in speech and objective efficacy in producing social action. By contrast, the materiality of the sign inspires polyvalence by providing new metaphorical connections (icons) and historical contiguities (indexes).

11. Thanks to Shea McManus for drawing my attention to this concept of Deleuze.

12. Curiously, Massumi mistranslated this passage, and I have corrected it in my own quotation. While his translation reads: "it is not impossible to make a radical break," (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:7), the original French text reads "l'on ne peut pas établir de coupure radicale entre régimes de signes et leurs objets" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980:13).

If Keane reminds us that signs are actualized through materiality, it is Mazzarella who indicates a path between affect and semiotics. While criticizing affect theorists for a romantic affection for unmediated connection (or "immediation"), he rescues the concept of affect by demonstrating its centrality to ritual and, in effect, any form of social institution that does not rely on force for its efficacy. The key to this transformation is to read Durkheim's *Elementary Forms* as "something that in today's polarized theoretical landscape has become almost unimaginable: a social theory that is at once semiological and affect-based" (Mazzarella 2009:296). Collective effervescence is quite clearly the kind of impersonal, contagious, preindividual force that Massumi, Thrift, or even Hardt and Negri were after—except that it is not in the slightest presocial or asocial: it is eminently and immanently social. It is the ritual form of the corroboree that produces affect that in turn gives life to the social. Mazzarella highlights the "subversive" quality of Durkheim's theory of ritual for understanding of modernity in terms of the affect of mass publicity. By reading the role of contemporary media in terms of Durkheimian affect, Mazzarella accounts for the intimacy of the public sphere, whose linkage is to a part of the self "more innervated and more abstract than the 'subject' whose coherent intentionality is the precondition for a liberally-imagined civic life" (2009:306).

Building from Mazzarella's insight that Durkheim is an affect theorist, I want to think more specifically about how affect is channeled semiotically and its integration with the autonomous, not-yet-conscious portion of the body's awareness. Within British symbolic anthropology descending from Durkheimian tradition, we find an implied theory of how signs produce affect and how affect infuses into signs, and I want to draw out the contemporary resonance of Turner's perspective on symbols as hybrids of the biological, the social, and the psychic. Etymologically, Turner tells us, the Ndembu word for symbol comes from the verb "to blaze a trail," in effect connecting the known and unknown (Turner 1967:48), thus making them part of the Peircian process of signs growing outward into the world. Turner insist on the polyvalence of symbols, and their communicative power in ritual often relies upon this ambiguity and even semiotic ambivalence. One of Turner's more Gluckmanian arguments here is that ritual symbols allow actors to at once make explicit allegiance to ideological norms while simultaneously performing disjunctive affect and social conflict.

In seeking to describe ritual symbols, Turner draws upon Sapir's distinction between referential symbols (corresponding to contemporary critical perspectives on semiotics as conventional, structured, and defined) and condensation symbols, defined as "highly condensed forms of substitutive behavior for direct expression, allowing for the ready release of emotional tension in conscious or unconscious form" (Sapir 1934:493).[13] As Turner describes people "observing, transgressing, and manipulating" symbols within ritual processes, he builds upon this distinction, oddly mirroring contemporary affect theorists equation of formal analysis and death:

> Static analysis would here presuppose a corpse, and as Jung says, "a symbol is alive." . . . [C]onceptualizing the symbol as if it were an object and neglecting its role in action often lead to a stress on only those aspects of symbolism which can be logically and consistently related to one another to form an abstract unitary system. In a field situation, the unity of a symbol or a symbolic configuration appears as the resultant of *many tendencies converging towards one another from different areas of biophysical and social existence*. The symbol is an independent force which is itself a product of many opposed forces. (Turner 1967:44–45; emphasis added)

This image of converging forces of social and biophysical existence is not only processual but vitalist (almost Deleuzian) and a far cry from the structure-functionalism of which Turner is sometimes accused.

But his reading of ritual symbols takes us even closer to affect, for Turner suggests that symbols have two poles—one more cognitive and connected to ideology and collective, normative values, the other more sensory or even affective, capable of the "transference of affectual quality" (1967:36). The sensual pole of the symbol is tied to its materiality; for example, the milk tree that is the focus of Turner's analysis in this essay exudes a white sticky sap associated with both breast milk and semen, while another tree that secretes a "dusky red gum" is associated with blood (1967:28). These qualities (what Peirce would call "iconic") thus form associations between the material qualities of things in the world and bodies, while at the same time linking them ideologically to shared (and contested) values explicitly invoked in the ritual. At the same time, the sensual symbolic pole is highly affective, producing and drawing upon emotional "energy" (Turner 1967:38) to provide efficacy to the ritual transformations at play. Thus, symbols produce an effect that could easily be confused with the language of affect theory today. Imagine replacing the word "symbol" with "affect" in the following quotation: "Symbols instigate social action. In a field context they may even be described as 'forces,' in that they are determinable influences inclining persons and groups to action" (Turner 1967:36).

Sapir argues not only that most symbols trigger "the unconscious spread of emotional quality" but that their power is often rationalized away as a mere reference (1934:494). Even simple forms of behavior, he argues, "include in their motivation unconscious and even unacknowledged impulses, for which the behavior must be looked upon as a symbol" (1934:494). Thus, semiosis should not be confused with reference or nominalism; nor should we imagine that our anthropological ancestors thought this way. Referential models of the sign fail to account for the kinds of semiosis that contain the greatest efficacy—those "condensed" symbols whose power comes precisely from their lack of clarity. The mask, the fetish, or the box of stored possessions are examples of signs whose materiality allows for

13. Condensation symbols are an idea taken from Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

rich bundlings of contradictory and surprising meanings, especially because their potency draws precisely on the potentiality of their concealed and unknown contents (Newell 2014). That very ambiguity can become itself the focus of collective action to reach some kind of (always deferred) agreement, allowing for the slippage into ideological representations of shared collective identity.

In other words, part of the efficacy of magic comes from the affective productivity of semiotic incoherence. This is, of course, very close to what Douglas predicts in her famous treatise on anomalies—the pangolin is sacred because it is such a strange animal that it transgresses cultural classification and therefore allows for the transcendence of cultural limitations (Douglas 1966). Harry West provides a lovely ethnographic illustration with his description of a healer in Mozambique who wrote cryptic, indecipherable messages on paper that she admitted she herself did not understand and mixed the paper in a bottle of water for her patient to drink (West 2007:40–44). His friend Tissa responded to his puzzled questions simply by exclaiming "But it works! Look at all the people who go to her. She must know *something*, because she heals them" (West 2007:42).

Even the archetype/villain of structured meaning, Lévi-Strauss, makes much the same point about "the effectiveness of symbols" in his analysis of shamanic healing (Lévi-Strauss 1963*a*). The shamanic "abreaction" is composed of a surfeit of signs whose meaning is obscure, while the patient suffers from a surfeit of experiential and emotional "feelings" without any means to express them—they are plagued by unqualified affect. Lévi-Strauss argues that in the conjunction of these two forces (often in the presence of a collective audience who anchor the interpretive process) a symbolic language is created that makes "sense" out of the traumatic overflow of corporeal sensation.

> The sorcerer-patient dyad incarnates for the group, in vivid and concrete fashion, an antagonism that is inherent in all thought but that normally remains vague and imprecise. The patient is all passivity and self-alienation, just as inexpressibility is the disease of the mind. The sorcerer is activity and self-projection, just as affectivity is the source of symbolism. The cure interrelates these opposite poles, facilitating the transition from one to the other. (Lévi-Strauss 1963*b*:177)

Lévi-Strauss of course insists that the cure relies on the construction of a coherent social-psychic-semiotic system, a movement from individual sensory confusion to collective definition, but this is where we can productively jump the tracks (Siegel 2006). The efficacy of magic lies not in the moment of collective order but in the turmoil that surrounds an effort to renegotiate that order. It is the dramatic performance of illusory coherence that proves effective for the patient as well as the audience. The affective magic lies in the associative leap that connects the mysterious infinite potentiality of an undefined sign (what Lévi-Strauss refers to as the floating signifier) with the inarticulated overflow of corporeal sensation that allows affect to flow into the sign and give it life and the sign to package affect into something that appears for a moment to be collectively intelligible.

If we take Stewart at her word, the efficacy of her own text works along the lines I have laid out above for magical efficacy—she defies expectations for linear clarity and statements of purpose in order to evoke affective rather than academic reactions in her readers. She writes,

> This book tries to slow the quick jump to representational thinking and evaluative critique long enough to find ways of approaching the complex and uncertain objects that fascinate because they literally hit us or exert a pull on us. . . . rather than seeking the closure or clarity of a book's interiority or riding a great rush of signs to a satisfying end. (Stewart 2007:4–5)

Aware that her readers will habitually seek closure and coherent messages, she resists. To get at nonlanguage kinds of conclusions, she cannot state them directly. Instead, she juxtaposes descriptions of scenarios or "fragments" in order to get at felt significances rather than spoken ones. But this does not make the effects of her book any less semiotic. Her semiotics are those of poesis rather than prose, the creative rearrangements of the bricoleur who changes the relative positionality of the entire array of meanings by moving signs from their habitual locations and creating new juxtapositions. This is exactly the kind of transformative efficacy found in sorcery and magic, in which the rearrangement of signs in unforeseen and partially obscured patterns produces affective forces in our embodied minds and cognized bodies. Stewart's writing feels magical because it takes the semiotic form of magic.

The point is not simply to reconnect affect with social and semiotic processes but to include the flow of affective forces between bodies, things, and other entities into an account of magical efficacy, for it is the "infolding" of symbols and socially transmitted affective force—what Durkheim calls "*mana*"—that allows for the healing effects of ritual and the deadly effects of sorcery attacks as well as the animation of things we try to ignore in the attic. And (just as Durkheim said of collective effervescence) it is precisely because this connection happens in a place that is neither "body" nor "conscious mind" that the forces of affect feel transcendent and beyond control—because in truth they are not of the self but of the social.

Conclusion: Affectively Collective

The stored things whose affective charge ultimately spurred this essay are retained and then contained because they refuse to behave like regular things. They are either too undesirable to have in visible social space, and yet too affectively potent to be detached, or too affectively charged to encounter on a regular basis. These are things whose material proximity to persons or events has allowed for the absorption of too much affect to be treated like mere objects, making them affective signs. This is what gives them an aura of magicality and animacy,

because they feel no longer like things but like something much closer to persons; and so social actors in the United States often cannot articulate a rational, conscious logic to their relationships with objects, even to themselves. Indeed, I suggest that the affective force of these haunted material objects rests in the gap between the rich indexicality of material things and the unsatiated expectation that they will make sense—it is the forever forestalled arrival of articulable meaning that grants these things their mysterious and compulsive attraction.

Thus, to examine the body as matter and to see that materiality as existing independently of its cultural construction does not mean that affects are asocial things divorced from strands of human communication and mental influence. If signs cannot be separated from their objects, if they are indeed embedded in physical and physiological processes, then the key anthropological question is not to determine how our actions are affected by preindividual, presubjective forces but how those forces and their trajectories are both incorporated into and produced by social worlds, so long as we understand these social worlds to be populated by all manner of nonhuman active entities, including signs themselves as affective objects and objects as affective signs.

The problem with imagining affect and material agencies as asemiotic is that in a moment when methodological individualism is stronger than ever, we risk an erosion of the very critique upon which anthropology and sociological thinking begin—the argument that many of our thoughts, feelings, and urges originate from neither our biological essence nor our subjective consciousness but from a collectively motivated space at once outside and within ourselves. Indeed, reading *Elementary Forms* against the grain, Mazzarella demonstrates that Durkheim's theory of ritual effervescence actually placed affect at the heart of the social, implying that all effective institutional sociality draws upon collective effervescence (Mazzarella 2010). Thus, "any social project that is not imposed through force alone must be affective in order to be effective" (Mazzarella 2009:299).

In its effort to capture unstructured potentiality and precultural forms of being, affect theory risks reducing the focus of anthropology to the points of contact between individual bodies and the material world. Indeed, this is explicitly the claim of Rapport in a recent article on Levinas and anthropology (Rapport 2015), in which he argues that it is the contingent encounters of a singular "phenomenological subjectivity" with incommensurable alterity (including its effects upon other isolated subjectivities) that should be the focus of anthropological analysis. Cultures, he says, are merely discursive fantasies, whereas individual bodies are ontologically real (Rapport 2015:273). True enough! But many anthropologists continue to believe that discursive fantasies are also real objects with superorganic lives of their own—what Durkheim referred to long ago as a social fact, precisely to insist upon its objectivity. Race, for example, is such a discursive fantasy, and few would deny the ontological reality of its effects upon the distribution of wealth, status, and even death (Fields and Fields 2014). The stakes, then, are for the very relevance of social entities (whether consisting of multiple bodies, material objects, discursive productions, or assemblages of all of these together) within anthropological analysis. By linking the social efficacy of affect to the (often unconscious) semiotic processes flowing between bodies, I aim to recuperate the social as a vital force of influence and creativity that shapes action before individual consciousness even has a chance to intervene (untraceable by the phenomenological subject).

Thus, what allows for ever-partial commensurabilities with other "bone-bound" bodies (Rapport 2015:257) is precisely the mediation of signs, be they physical traces, sonic waves, visual iconography, or olfactory effluvia. Indeed, because conceptualization is anchored in processes of objectification (Miller 2005) and the subsequent circulation of materialized signs, the "colonization of each other's minds is the price we pay for thought" (Douglas 1975:xx). The GIF keyboard with which I began this article is merely one of the newer media for transmitting affective information. If one can accept the broader conceptualization of signs I espouse in this article, as any kind of indicative material trace transmitted by any entity, then many of these communications are sent and received without our subjective awareness and are thus bound up in the very affective transfers that make social flows compulsive, producing viral posts, flash mobs, lynch mobs, fads, and political revolution. This is where affect theory and "subversive" Durkheimian sociality can mesh productively to take agency and intentionality outside the subject and the individual body but still contextualize it within the flows and force fields of social energy that leap and seep between multispecies bodies, personal possessions, digital networks, genes, and yes, even subjectivities.

Comments

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Hoarding Theory

It is well known that in 1970 Foucault predicted that his century would "perhaps one day" be known as "Deleuzian" (Foucault 1977:165). Sasha Newell suggests that the Deleuzian century has turned Lévy-Bruhlian. Lévy-Bruhl devoted six books to a search for the border between the primitive and the civilized mentalities. He traced this border atop Plato's distinction between *methēxis* and *mimēsis*. The primitive mentality was supposed to operate by participation, the civilized by representation.

But in the *Notebooks* he kept at the end of his life, Lévy-Bruhl takes it all back. The *Notebooks* record not a doctrine, but a struggle. He concedes that he cannot sustain his distinction between the two mentalities. But he cannot throw it out, either. He hoards it instead.

Newell suggest that anthropology is a hoarder too. It clings to the distinction between the semiotic and the affective long after the world where it made sense has passed away. He does not ask anthropologists to stop hoarding it. He urges them not to be embarrassed by it.

Lévy-Bruhl says that representation is cognitive, while participation is "affective" (Lévy-Bruhl 1975 [1949]:106). An object can be represented. A "consubstantiality" among objects can only be felt. Consequently, something about participation is "deeply rebellious to intelligibility." Its essence is "bipresence." People and their possessions (or "appurtenances") act on each other from a distance, as do "[a] symbol and what it represents" (1975 [1949]:108).

Participation comes before representation, just as affect precedes cognition. To explain participation is therefore an embarrassment to reason: "how is one to understand that the human mind could be at one and the same time the mainspring of the rational and irrational?" (1975 [1949]:99).

Newell says that hoarders express "frustration and embarrassment" at their inability to say why they keep stuff, "indicating an affective range of mental activity walled off from their rationalist self-representation." A musician, for example, cannot find words to explain how her mother's possessions remain active after her death.

Lévy-Bruhl suffers embarrassment too. In separating the two mentalities, he walls off affect from reason. And he is a hoarder. He stores up an archive of impossible possibilities, though by attributing them to other societies, he allows himself to hold on to them without losing his own rationalist self-representation. In fact, when he distinguishes an "us" from a "them"—questions that seem natural to "us," he says, do not arise for "them" (Lévy-Bruhl 1975 [1949]:50)—he adopts the point of view of the limited omniscient narrator who tells a novel's readers what its characters are thinking and feeling. A literary technique enables him to hoard.

In the *Notebooks*, however, Lévy-Bruhl's wall begins to crumble. In June, 1938, he admits that "it is impossible to claim a mentality that is peculiar to primitive men and to them alone" (Lévy-Bruhl 1975 [1949]:39). Newell speaks of "Lévy-Bruhlian participation," but in August, 1938, Lévy-Bruhl renounces "the law of participation." He wants instead to understand whether what he has been calling the primitive mentality "is in reality an aspect . . . of human mentality in general," a universal structure of the human mind (1975 [1949]:104). Suddenly, Lévy-Bruhl sounds like Lévi-Strauss. In October, he declares the affectiveness of symbols, though it requires him to bring his primitives back to life: "for the 'primitive man' [in quotation marks now] words . . . participate, like other symbols, in what they represent; they *are*, to a certain degree, what they express" (1975 [1949]:128).

Newell holds on to this possibility. Although he hoards the dead man's idea, however, he tosses out the distinction that Lévy-Bruhl could not bring himself to fully renounce. Signs, he says, "live and vibrate." Matter possesses "liveliness" (traditionally, a rhetorical value). Signs "are people too," just as for C. S. Peirce people are "external signs" (Peirce 1992 [1868]:54).

Newell says that the affect is the semiotic capacity of stored matter. "To touch is to participate" in things that are simultaneously signs. Lévy-Bruhl says that participation engages the affective category of the supernatural, a category he apparently borrows from the discussion of epic in Aristotle's *Poetics* (1987), for it sets to work whenever we experience surprise. What surprises us is any event that interrupts the chain of natural causality: something that cannot happen, like the "invisible and imperceptible" activity of nonhuman or part-human agents (Lévy-Bruhl 1975 [1949]:26–27).

An affect, Deleuze and Guattari propose, invoking Book Three of Spinoza's *Ethics*, is a degree of power. Latitudinally, it is what a body can do. Longitudinally, it is what bodies can do to each other (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:258–260). Their proposition resurfaces in Newell's essay under the signature of Jane Bennett, who hoards the opposition that Lévy-Bruhl wanted to be rid of: the affective versus the cognitive. She stands for a school of "new vitalists" who elevate the living above the dead, *physis* above *technē*, and so regard semiotics as a vampire that "sucks" the liveliness from matter and replaces it with "dead categories." But when has the sign not oscillated between life and death? Historically, speech was said to be closer than writing to living, self-present consciousness. Today, affect is said to be closer than the sign to the living body because it plugs directly into a nervous system that writes its way out of language (Massumi 1995:92). The system of feeling oneself affected supplants the system of "hearing (understanding)-oneself speak" (Derrida 1974:7–8).

Newell suggests that anthropology is hoarding a boxful of conceptual prejudices. It keeps what Lévy-Bruhl could not bring himself to throw out in 1938. Newell asks us to reject our rejections. Of course, this too is hoarding. You do not have to throw out the sign while you hold onto affect.

But does Newell's invocation of Durkheim's "effervescence" build another wall against the embarrassment of the irrational? Durkheim summons up the possibility that a sign without sense or reference is pure affect. The "totemic design" on the "*churinga*" has power only insofar as it fails at mimesis. There would be an affectiveness of nonmimetic symbols. Having raised it, however, Durkheim retreats from this possibility and attributes the affectiveness of the Indigenous "design" to a kind of precommodity fetishism (Bracken 2007:164–165). The real force is "the social." But in doing so does not he restore the limit between the affective and the semiotic?

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In this article, Newell resituates affect theory with respect to semiotics in a way that goes beyond affect theory's unproductive, and ultimately incoherent, self-description as being

somehow "asemiotic" (i.e., diametrically opposed to semiotics, unfortunately conceptualized, as Newell notes, as a kind of Saussurean semiology). Newell's critique leads to a productive dialog between affect theory and semiotics and illustrates what might be gained from this with an ethnographic description of the materiality of hauntings. As someone who is admittedly both interested in and ambivalent about affect theory, I find both these aspects of the article stimulating, and I discuss them in turn here.

As Newell's article and other recent critiques (such as that of Pile 2010) make clear, contemporary affect theory conceptualizes affect as a bundle of three seemingly logically separable features: affect is "non-cognitive, inter-personal, non-representational" (Pile 2010:8). To my mind, these features do not form a completely natural class, so that affect seems as if it might be a hybrid of a couple of distinct but overlapping features. The first feature, that it is noncognitive, seems to me the weakest link of the three. As Newell notes, the dated neuroscience on which it is based has been trenchantly critiqued by Martin (2013). But the main problem for me is that, as Newell emphasizes, this part of the theory produces a very strong, literally Cartesian dualism between the body as locus of affect and the mind as locus of ideation or cognition. Affect, then, is located in the body, which does not jibe particularly well with the Spinozan definition of affect as interpersonal, something exists between bodies. There may be some way to square this circle. As Newell notes, influential affect theorists such as Massumi, perhaps sensing the contradiction here, try to square this circle by turning affect as something that happens between bodies into something that exists physically within one body: the external indexical relations between bodies must be internalized and embodied to become affect, which can happen "[o]nly if the *trace* of past actions *including a trace of their contexts* were conserved in the brain and in the flesh" (Massumi 1995:91).

Newell explicitly regrounds affect—whether conceptualized as "forces in the body" or "forces at play between bodies"—in the Peircean semiotics of indexicality. At the risk of engaging in some "soul-killing semiotic analysis," I would like to explore a bit further where I think Newell's incisive insight can take us. As Newell points out, indexical signs are nonrepresentational (indexes "assert nothing") signs, grounded not in Peircean thirdness ("thinking," representation) or in firstness ("feeling," indeterminacy) but in secondness (alterity, brute force, compulsion, "reaction"), the dyadic and dynamic relations between bodies (Manning 2016). Peirce defines secondness ("reaction") as follows:

> [T]his sense of acting and of being acted upon, which is our sense of the reality of things,—both of outward things and of ourselves,—may be called the sense of Reaction. It does not reside in any one Feeling; it comes upon the breaking of one feeling by another feeling. It essentially involves two things acting upon one another. (Peirce 1894:§1)

To my mind, Newell's key theoretical insight is that, so far from being absolutely opposed to semiosis ("asemiotic"), affect is intimately tied to the nonrepresentational semiosis of indexicality, which is in turn grounded in "secondness," which is opposed to the ideational or representational dimension of semiosis, thirdness. If we leave aside the "noncognitive" dimension of affect, Peircean secondness directly expresses the "interpersonal" dimension of affect ("the shock of reaction between ego and nonego," "the double consciousness of effort and resistance") and also its "nonrepresentational" aspect ("not a conception," "something that cannot properly be conceived. For to conceive it is to generalize it."):

> The practical exigencies of life render Secondness the most prominent of the three [sc., Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness]. This is not a conception, nor is it a peculiar quality. It is an experience. It comes out most fully in the shock of reaction between ego and nonego. It is there the double consciousness of effort and resistance. That is something which cannot properly be conceived. For to conceive it is to generalize it; and to generalize it is to miss altogether the ***here***ness and ***now***ness which is its essence. (Peirce 1994: 8.266)[14]

To summarize: if we mean affect in Spinoza's sense as the capacity to affect and be affected by another, something arising from "an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body" (Massumi 1987:xvi), then affect is essentially the same thing as secondness (which is the ground for indexicality). Affect is thus dyadic (a secondness), rather than monadic (a firstness), and so is interpersonal, a relation between bodies, but it is inchoate, not yet interpreted or mediated as an articulable emotion (a triadic thirdness), that is, nonrepresentational. By drawing our attention to the way that affect is centrally constituted by the semiotics of indexicality, Newell shows that affect, the capacity to affect and be affected, in this sense belongs to the semiotic order of secondness central to Peircean semiotics (Manning 2016).

Turning to the ethnographic case, Newell's ethnographic treatment of hauntings (specifically hauntings attending stored objects) as being a primordial site for the study of affect as a set of indexical relationship between bodies (human and nonhuman), building on Navaro-Yashin (2012) in particular, provides a brilliant exposition of precisely what a semiotically grounded theorization of affect can provide in relation to an ethnographically rich case. Crucially, for Newell, storage units and the objects they contain seem haunted precisely because of the gap between the inchoate indexical aura of multiple "pointings" embodied in these jumbled stored objects and the unsatiated expectations for meaning (or perhaps presence of absent others as well) that they elicit. Newell's ethnography of the affects of haunting of storage units and attics allows them to be grouped with other material assemblages—the classic example being ruins—whose heterogeneity and material disorder afford their own affective animation of haunting (as I argue elsewhere, also drawing on Navaro-Yashin 2012):

14. I use the standard citation system for the writings of Peirce.

> The alterity and liminality of ruins—uncanny, excessive, and unruly material assemblages of heterogeneous elements of past and present, culture and nature, human and nonhuman—produce destabilizing and unsettling affects. These affects seem initially inchoate, inarticulate, unutterable, but in different cultural or historical frameworks, they can be articulated in emotions or feelings ranging from "queerness" in Cornish legends to "pleasing melancholy" among picturesque travelers. (Manning 2017:70)

Throughout this paper, Newell stresses the way the trope of animated and animating affect versus cold dead signs seems to underlie affect theory. The paper ends with a way that signs and other things in situations of haunting seem to gain an "affective charge" by their material proximity to persons, so that they can no longer be treated as ordinary things but seem to have "an aura of magicality and animacy, because they feel no longer like things but like something much closer to persons." As this paper makes clear, affect is strongly associated with ideas of animation, animacy, and animism, indeed, it seems almost the very principle of lively animacy or "animatedness," which, as Ngai argues, seems to be the "most basic or minimal of all affective conditions: that of being, in one way or another, 'moved'" (Ngai 2005:91, see also Ngai 2002). Newell shows, in effect, that affect theory is latently a theory of animation, animacy, or "animatedness" and deserves comparison with other recent interventions in the semiotics of animation (Silvio 2010).

Tropes of animation haunt this paper. For example, Newell begins the paper with a brilliant discussion of animated GIFs, of course, whose animation of affect stands in contrast with the coded representations of emotions found in conventionalized emoticons or *emoji*.[15] But Silvio shows that East Asian equivalents of emoticons—*emoji* ("picture characters") and *kaomoji* ("face characters"; on which also see Miller 2011)—move from cold dead symbols for lively human animation (remediated poses, faces) to being fully embodied beings who engage in actions such as table-flipping *kaomoji* (e.g., (╯°□°)╯︵┻━┻), very similar to the animated GIFs Newell explores as expressions of inchoate affect. These fully embodied *kaomoji* can become individuated, lively characters with whom people can form affective relationships in their own right:

> [W]hat started as simple facial expressions represented through common keyboard symbols (e.g., :) for a smile) has now developed through more elaborate keyboard cartoons (e.g., (°Д°) for surprise) to complete animated characters, such as Taiwan's Wan Wan and Onion Head (both of these are now licensed characters and appear on a wide variety of stationery products and toys, as well as in the form of digital images). (Silvio 2010:433)[16]

For some reason, in this process of animation, there is a further moment of animism, in that what started out as apparently human faces (*kaomoji*) often reveal themselves as cats, rather than humans, when they acquire bodies and become characters (on the pervasive "zoomorphic urge" found here, see Miller 2010). An example would be the incorporation of the *kaomoji* (°Д°) above into the feline character Giko Neko around 1999. Not only is the original *kaomoji* face incorporated into a feline body, sometimes with the attached caption "please die," but as Giko Neko moves from being a response ("please die") to a character, the diagnostic graphic features that coded affect or emotion become characterological features distinguishing this character from other similar erstwhile *kaomoji*-turned-feline-characters (fig. 1). No longer deployed as a coding of affect or emotional response, the character that Giko Neko becomes enters into complex animated and affectively engaging narratives, including sagas of unrequited love and *Matrix*-like action.[17] In this animating process of "characterization" (Nozawa 2013), *emoji*, which begin as signs—"cold, rational, defined, and transparent" representations of lively affects—become animated characters, "affective signs," "signs [who] are people too."

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Worldly Thinking

We need to think differently now after the long-ago unsettling of egocentric models of the subject and consciousness and the newly capacious attention to the whole gamut of sensual, affective, environmental, technological, social, genetically modified, capitalist-destroyed, plant, mineral, and animal entanglements it has become unavoidable to notice. The question is Where are we now? How do we rethink the problematics of living through what's happening?

There's a lot of anxiety. Forts won't help. A return to a crystalline Anthro World isn't enough. The mantric gesture that everything is mediated, cultural, and meaning based doesn't engage the weight of the world. Thought itself has to become more worldly. The vitalism of the social is now distributed across a wild expanse of sensual, affective, material, aesthetic, physical, chemical, and biological life. It's now so important to

15. An interesting, alarming, and seemingly growing trend is the ubiquitous use of "digital blackface GIFs," that is, the use of GIF reactions that utilize animated images of black people displaying excessive affect (also citing Ngai's [2002, 2005] argument that racial others, and black people in particular, are associated with excessive affect and "animatedness"); see Jackson (2017).

16. For Onion Head characters, see http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/onion-tou.

17. For the entire evolution of this character, see http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/giko-%E3%82%AE%E3%82%B3.

Figure 1. The evolution of Giko Neko from *kaomoji* to character. A color version of this figure is available online.

notice that the social is not a thing on the shelf but literally takes place as a series of events engaging sensations, perceptions, energies, atmospheres, moods, and the qualities of all kinds of things throwing together into phenomena from one minute to the next (as in "when did tattooing your head become a thing?"). All of this is social. That's what affect mapping and new materialist thing tracking has taught us, and from this there's no real going back.

It's not that things don't have meaning, it's that meaning is a thing much stranger and bigger than we used to think it was. Like everything else, it's not a dead object but a thing that has to be walked around, approached from angles, watched as it unfolds and shifts and does things in one scene and then another: a thing deployed, occurring in media, often manipulated or massaged into shape, a part of the world.

As for what to do now, we might want to start by relaxing the muscle of what Eve Sedgwick (1997) called strong theory—a logic that plows through its descriptive objects unfazed by their textures and enigmas. We could back up off the precipice of a paranoid critique unnaturally proud of its academic political moves to upend or one-up someone else's efforts and ending up always at the crazy endgame of thinking only that there is something wrong with other people and the world. Sedgwick proposed a weak theory more moved by its objects and curious about what might be unfolding: a method with more room to breathe, a backing off instead of a backing up.

Why not utter the amazingly still unuttered question of whether *our* thought could be anything other than critique? What about all the worldly forms of thought attached to every practice, form, and entity all around us? What about the disparate registers in which things take place, or the way incommensurate things get magnetized to something taking off, or all the modes of nimble reaction like humor, sleeplessness, immersion in sound and visuals, performative excess or enervation, and good and bad behavior of all kinds?

We might need to just slow it down, so slow that attention can stretch to encompass this rhythm here, that detail, those variegated labors of living through things; slow enough to walk around big questions of difference and frictious collective sensibilities to catch their angles and rough edges, their moments of functionality and slippage, how they rev up or rest. We might try exercising some lost ethnographic muscle to notice the actual media in which things take place, the subtle or brutal in what's happening, the idiosyncratic or rigidly fundamentalist proclivities of this and that, the ways that people endure, falter, flourish, or go sideways under certain kinds of pressure.

In this, affect theory and new materialism are not the enemy but some strands of a beginning. They're far from a dominant force zipping up other academic lips. And I never met an affect theory that was a biological determinist.

There are bodies, yes: real and fantasmatic bodies, corporeal bodies, bodies of thought, bodies of sociality and politics. Matter resonates with impact, making it readable, contagious, and very much in and of the social. Grounded in the question of the threshold between potentiality and actuality, affect theory is attuned to emergent forms, or forms in formation and deployed in social use. This recognition of form touching matter is the same work of the brilliant Peircean ethnographic semiotics of Sally Ann Ness (2016) on the body learning to boulder or Paul Kockelman (2016) on chickens and quetzals traversing ontologies and forms of valuing. These current moves in anthropological theory and practice have already moved far beyond questions of indeterminacy and flow in their more and more capacious attention to the precisions of new anthropological objects found in densities, temporalities, trajectories, ontologies, rhythms, atmospheres, and on.

Theory now is about *distributed* agency, affect, meaning, media, force. We need more fluency in the zone this theory opens between epistemology and ontology. We need more competency in thinking about the real and forms of realism that

produce not more dead objects or war cries that "everything" is X or Y but compositions pulling into tricky alignment with the artful, aesthetic, political, generative, precarious compositions of worlds already in process all around us.

For that, we need experimental methods that create new forms of the concept. My thinking here is the result of a profound, fun, and funny collaboration with Lauren Berlant called *The Hundreds*, in which we put thought under the pressure of 100-word constraints. This changes the environment of thought. We've learned to follow prompts. Every glance or edit is a reprompting. We catch something, back up at the hint of a precision. Thought takes on a habit of surprise as it latches onto something, arrives somewhere, still looking around. It turns to what could happen, not what seven things make this scene an example of some big picture located in an elsewhere.

What we need is thought experiments that exercise our capacities to respond to what's going and hone thinking modes to the task.

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Critique in the Gap

So much of affect theory seems stuck in a gap. With the ascendancy of Brian Massumi's *Parables for the Virtual* (2002) as the central node around which a particular set of ideas and themes on affect has crystallized, his notion of an unbridgeable ontological gap between intensities moving through bodies (affect) and feelings captured in minds (emotions) has become one of the most common targets of critique for affect theorists. That an idea so fundamental to this literature has also become the one so often challenged is neither problematic for an anthropology of affect nor particularly uncommon for the discipline in general, especially given how accustomed anthropologists have grown in critiquing their own foundational concepts. However, it is worth drawing a contrast between work that in deconstructing this gap threatens to dissolve the distinctions between affect and emotion that affect theorists have worked hard to delimit and work that refines these distinctions toward advancing the important anthropological record on emotions from the 1970s to the 1990s into new affective terrain. Newell's critique of the gap unquestionably falls within this latter work, but I think that it does so most convincingly not when it positions itself against the gap but rather when it illustrates the potential of being stuck right in the middle of it.

The central claim of Newell's piece is that the affective turn has also largely been—as his title has it—an "antisemiotic" one. He explains, "[T]he affective turn seems most often to position semiosis and affect as opposites." Offering a list of theorists for whom "the very idea that signs and affect speak together (and to each other) would seem to contradict the very root of their distinction," he suggests that too often these thinkers create a gap that irreconcilably prevents connecting "interiorities with external objects, materiality with spirit, cultural and nonhuman." While I agree that too much of affect theory ignores the cultural conditioning of materiality and unreservedly support Newell's project to trace how signs are "embedded in physical and physiological processes," I wonder whether, by overstating the degree to which new materialists have excluded semiotics from materiality, he may sacrifice some of those useful distinctions of the affect-emotion gap articulated by those he challenges. Consider, for example, Brian Massumi's treatment of the Bush administration's introduction of its color-coded terror alert system, by which Massumi demonstrates how a new signaling system allowed the government to "wirelessly [jack] . . . central government functioning directly into each individuals' nervous system" (Massumi 2015:172). Here Massumi engages explicitly with semiosis, but in a way that preserves a distinction between conscious feeling and the nonconscious manipulation of affect: the signals "addressed not subjects' cognition, but rather bodies' irritability. Perceptual cues were being used to activate direct bodily responsiveness rather than reproduce a form or transmit definite content" (Massumi 2015:172). In Massumi's account, we perceive an exchange between the semiotic function of signaling and the automatic—though not necessarily culturally unconditioned—response of affect. As a result, when Newell argues that "to overcome mind-body dualism, we must be able to trace the feedback effects between signs upon the body and the body upon semiosis," I think that we might point to passages like these where Massumi is in fact laying the theoretical groundwork for precisely this kind of project.[18]

At times, Newell seems antagonistic toward the gap between affect and emotion that he claims theorists have overstated; however, in passages that draw from his fascinating ethnographic work on storage space in North Carolina, such as in his description of the "indeterminate spaces of unsettled perceptions" and of the haunting of the "implied presence of others" within the belongings of recently deceased family members, he emphasizes the importance of these gaps. But what kind of gaps are we talking about? I think that what Newell's work best demonstrates is how anthropologists seeking to operationalize critical affect theory toward productive ethnographic fieldwork might benefit from making a distinction between the ontological and the epistemological gaps between affect and emotion. Unfortunately, some work overemphasizing the former—a smaller collection than I think Newell suggests—indeed fetishizes affect as a kind of material reality operating independently of culture. In contrast, focusing on the epistemological gaps between what we feel and what we know about what we feel

18. Newell acknowledges exceptions to his critique of the antisemiotic turn, including Hemmings (2005), Leys (2011), Mazzarella (2009), and Navaro-Yashin (2009). In addition to Massumi's (2015) work discussed here, he might also add Berg and Ramos-Zayas (2015), Ngai (2005, 2012), and White (2017).

foregrounds the power imbalances at play within these disjointed spaces and how they are highly generative of discourses—scientific, technological, political, religious, ethical—that claim exclusive knowledge to what bodies are capable of outside of conscious representation.[19]

Ultimately, Newell's argument that signs affect across the ontological affect-emotion gap is an undeniable point, and that they can do so through a semiotic entelechy should serve as a critical lesson to ethnographers seeking to trace affect's movements in the field. However, where Newell demonstrates how signs also affect within the disjunctions of the epistemological affect-emotion gap, I think that he expertly operationalizes affect theory to attend to its primary ethnographic task today—to demonstrate how the cultural (ideation, signs, concepts, networks of social relations) plays a fundamental role in conditioning affective capacities of bodies that are by their very nature culturally coded things.

Reply

Affective Response

Since this piece was originally drafted, my sense of the increasing hold of affect theory on anthropological discourse has been continuously reaffirmed, perhaps most clearly by a special issue of *Cultural Anthropology* devoted to affect this year. I am honored that two of the authors present there have responded to this piece (Stewart 2017; White 2017). Furthermore, I am lucky to have authors representing two other key domains I have attempted to suture together in this piece: semiotic theory and the history of anthropology.

I must begin with the confession that, as Bracken suggests, I have been hoarding theory. Indeed, my new colleague David Berliner pointed out recently that my relationship to anthropological theory is a symptom of my generalized affection for old things (which of course underlies my research on storage and hoarding). Stored things are often reservoirs of affective traces and connections, and it is worth recalling Bracken's rendition of Benjamin's argument that objects from the past allow for a kind of participatory reflection, through what Bracken calls "immediation," which "consists not in any reflecting *on* an entity but in the unfolding of reflection—that is . . . the unfolding of spirit—*in* an entity" (Benjamin, cited in Bracken 2007:148). Even if anthropology has been a leader in the critique of the "North Atlantic universal" of modernity (Trouillot 2002), it remains ruled over by the deity of progress, such that with the exception of a few classics we are obliged to keep teaching, ideas tend to lose value in proportion to their longevity. But theories are also old things that, if allowed to unfold within us, provide new platforms for reflection on contemporary theoretical issues.

While anthropology's past is littered with colonial detritus and forced into the ordering, structuring aesthetics of modernism, it is also the site of the earliest efforts to defuse and deconstruct these positions. Key genealogical germinations of our present discourse are thrown in among the rubble that too many contemporary anthropologists set by the curb, as evidenced by some of the reactions to Sahlins's cranky "emeritus rant" on the *HAU* Facebook page. I stand by my effort to reject these rejections and hoard what is valuable within the admittedly dirty, polluted debris of anthropology's past. While I do find the need to jettison a good deal of dry rot in the history of anthropology, I continue to find beauty in the remains. Hoarding is radical hospitality in Derrida's sense (2000), an ethics of acceptance in which everything is allowed into the home before evaluation. It is, in short, a practice of cultural relativism, a rejection of a priori cultural schemas of value. This is what I try (and often fail) to do with theory.

Of course, such radical hospitality is ultimately unsustainable. Guests sometimes abuse their welcome if you do not place brackets around "my house is your house." Even inorganic objects are parasitical in the way they take up space and time and drain affective energy, and hoarding is considered a psychological disorder because of the damage it does to bodily health and social relations. Ideas are things that worm their way into the flesh of bodies, and they are dangerous guests indeed, with viral capacities to take over their host's operational *dispositif*. Some ideas are unethical to host. But anthropologists should approach previous anthropological worlds with anthropological openness to alter-ontologies and alter-epistemologies.

And so I wanted to demonstrate not only that affect theory meshes well with early anthropological thinking but also that there are plenty of precursors to affective transmissions in the history of anthropological thought; as a discipline whose methods have been embodied in the qualia of the everyday since Malinowski, anthropology has long been interested in bodily experience and unconscious modes of sensibility. As Bracken points out, Lévy-Bruhl himself, after decades of insistence on a racist opposition between primitive and scientific mentalities, tentatively rethought it as a gap existing within all minds, basically carving out a place for an affective logic of participation in all human sensibility: "in order to explain participation, it is necessary to be careful to stay on the affective plane, and not to yield to the temptation to slide onto the cognitive plane in order to make it 'intelligible'" (Lévy-Bruhl 2002 [1949]:86), "participation is felt, not thought" (2002 [1949]:134).

19. Such a narrowing also holds the potential of enfolding the problem of the ontological gap within the epistemological one, as problems of chemical translation between mind and body that anthropologists struggle with as they engage with fields such as neuroscience become problems of discursive translation. In other words, the challenge becomes no longer to trace affect across a material threshold where semiosis is necessarily left at the door but rather to identify how certain antisemiotic claims structure variable access to and control over affective knowledge. In the former case, the anthropologist works against the gap; in the latter, he works from within it.

I hope that I do not appear to treat affect theory and new materiality as "enemies" that we must fortify the discipline against, as I explicitly embrace the potential of these perspectives in the essay. I have been affected in particular by the writings of Stewart and Massumi, and if these authors sometimes appear as targets in the essay, it is through my efforts to redeem what appeared to me as an "enemy" in some of their writing—the sign. I wrote with the frustration of the misunderstood, because when I spoke to anthropologists about the semiosis of stored objects, I was often told that this was the wrong approach. While I am taken in by the potential of affect for social thought, I wanted to show in fact how complementary it can be to symbolic anthropology, both giving new life to texts that feel "outdated" and providing a more familiar frame to perceive affect's effects. This text is meant to serve as connective discursive tissue to bind affect within the web of anthropological thought, not as a newcomer but as an estranged member of the kin group.

The key, as Stewart writes, is a more open understanding of the social, and Kockelman's concept of distributed agency (Enfield and Kockelman 2017) is exactly the kind of thinking I am after; both my argument about the affectiveness of signs and my effort to demonstrate a spectrum between collection, clutter, hoarding, and purging are about thinking of social entities as distributions of connective personhood or even subjectivities through networks of actors, be they human, nonhuman organisms, inorganic objects, algorithms, or superorganic forces—to borrow Kroeber's (1917) fave now-forgotten term. Too much social theory has contained agency within the individual. Objects are affective offshoots of the people who care for them, dwell with them, inhabit them. Affect streams out of people and pools in things, or reverberates off them, or rubs off on contact. Such objects become extensions of personal agencies, sometimes by design, sometimes without anybody noticing. When objects are jumbled together without sense, as when a place "is a mess" or the clutter has ceased to respect the boundaries of its containment, the noncoordinated nonverbal plaints of objects can be clashing, grating, draining, distracting—affectively loud. But just as the chaos of the city street creates a social hum that some people come to depend on, there are people who come to need the cluttered affective undercurrent of a panoply of partible personhood.

In claiming that affect travels along paths of semiosis, I do not negate an ontological gap between emotion and affect, as White seems to suggest—I agree that there is a realm of bodily intercommunication that takes place outside of self-conscious recognition. This is just where material objects assert themselves most powerfully, precisely because there is no clear-cut cultural schema with which to understand their effects on actor subjectivity.

As Manning reminds us, Peirce's categories are helpful here, as affect really fits well in the realm of presymbolized "secondness," of interconnection and causality without abstraction, without laws, without Saussurean signifieds of any kind, a realm of materiality. Following Ngai, the purest kind of affective connection is one that "moves" without necessarily being intelligible as a recognized or categorizable force. As White suggests, this is where the epistemological gap between affect and emotion is extremely interesting for anthropologists. Hoarders are considered social deviants and psychologically unwell precisely because their pattern of relating to objects does not correspond to culturally prescribed emotional values attached to objects—there is a surplus of attachment to things that they cannot articulate the value of but with which they participate in sociality. Where I perhaps run most against the grain of affect theory is my claim that symbols, as objects, carry affect as well as whatever coded content they are recognized to contain.

Manning also emphasizes the latent connection between animation and affect. Indeed, in my unpublished core work on storage and hoarding, animacy is one of my key terms for thinking about accumulations as social entities, themselves assembled out of many smaller entities, each with its own affective valence. Insofar as material objects become entangled in affect, they are animated by the very sociality that produces them and endows them with value, and this is where the haunting, the longing, the sacred character of heirlooms originates. I am especially interested in the way that patterns of sociality that reach across boundaries between bodies, across species, and even between bodies and objects take on superorganic valences, sometimes appearing, at least in the eyes of humans, to be creatures in their own right.

I am not seeking to contain affect in social and cultural structures. I want to foster appreciation for the kinship between ideas of distributed agency and the force of a crowd gripped by the effervescence of *conscience collective*, the hypnosis of a cellphone screen and the feeling of comfort and companionship provided by a grandfather's coat, the uncanniness of a stranger's appropriated kitchenware and the contagion of a GIF's intensity. These are, following Stewart, all social: not social in the way we have been trained to read Durkheim, as a cold institutional constraint or Borg-like homogenous mentality, but rather a flowing of energy (Mazzarella 2017), a viral distribution of meme-like bits and pieces of actions, signs, feelings, and reactions, but above all the influence of externality upon the preconsciousness of our innermost thoughts.

—Sasha Newell

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