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AFFECT THEORY

Theorizing the Emotional and the Affective in Anthropology

Bachelor's thesis

Discipline: Cultural Anthropology

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Declaration

I declare that I have written my bachelor's thesis on "*Affect Theory: Theorizing the Emotional and the Affective in Anthropology*" independently and have listed all the literature and other sources I have used.

In Olomouc on 6th April 2023



Marek Hrubý

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Annotation

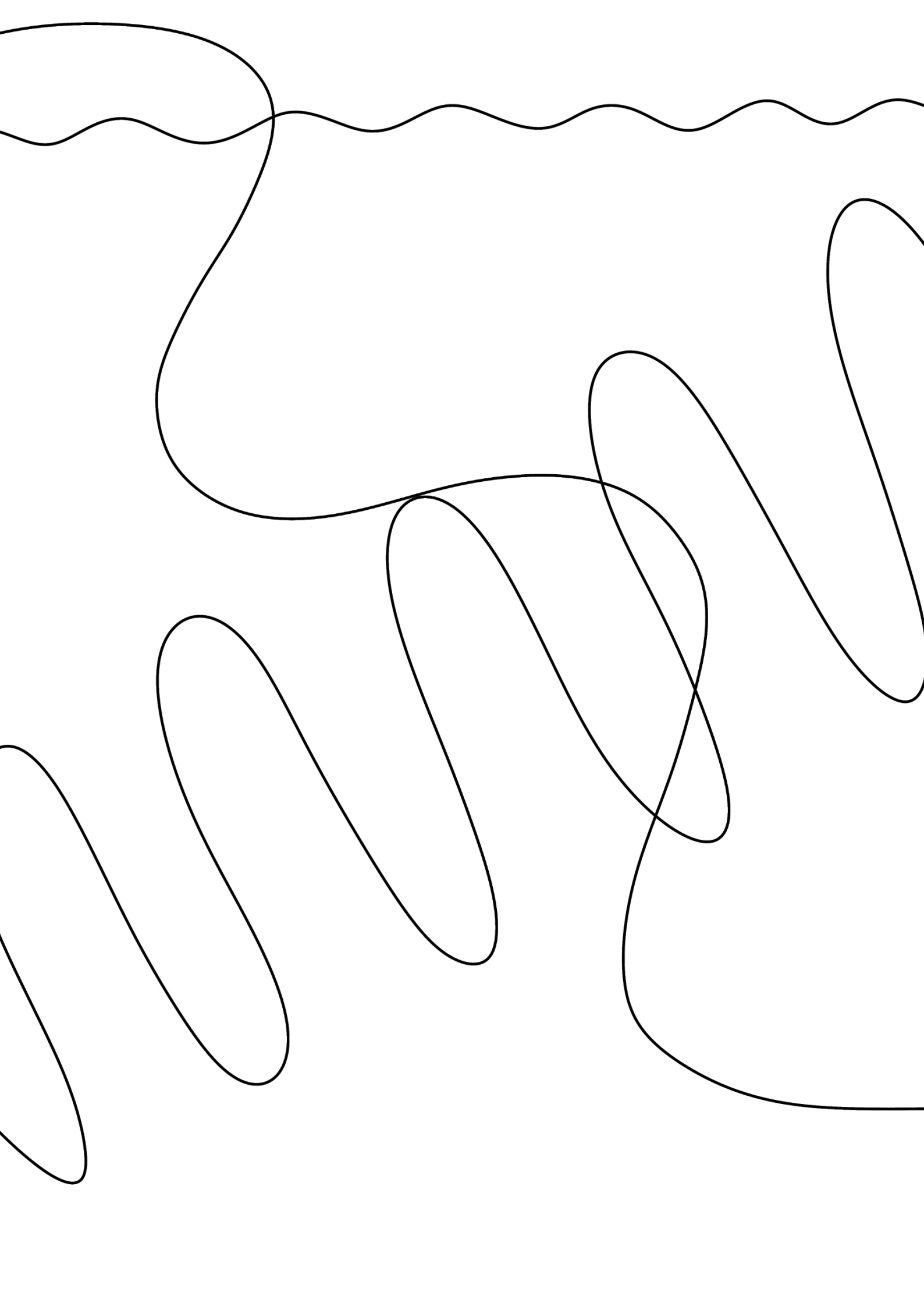
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Title of thesis:	Affect Theory: Theorizing the Emotional and the Affective in Anthropology
Annotation:	<p>Traditionally, emotions have always been pushed aside into the realm of psychology, often escaping the subject, method, and scope of anthropological inquire. The turn to affect or the affective turn of the 1990s is the result of a growing interest in the emotional and affective dimension of reality. Affect theory explores the role of emotions and affects, the personal and the embodied, and as such raises some intriguing ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions. In my theoretical thesis, I address some of these questions by means of an interdisciplinary and critical approach to the topic, arguing that emotions and affects are an inseparable part of human experience. After briefly exposing how emotions and affects have been approached throughout the history of anthropology, I first interpret and evaluate some of the distinctive features of contemporary affect theorizing to later arrive at three thematic vectors for the adoption of affect in anthropology. I conclude that affect theory offers a useful way to make emotions and affects more intertwined and integrated into anthropological research.</p>
Keywords:	affect, affect theory, Deleuze, dynamic ontology, emotion, relational ontology, Spinoza
Název práce	Afektová teorie: Teoretizování emocí a afektů v antropologii

<p>Anotace práce:</p>	<p>V historii antropologie byly emoce poněkud tradičně odsouvány do oblasti psychologie a často se vymykaly předmětu, metodě a rozsahu antropologického a etnografického zkoumání. Obrat k afektu neboli afektivní obrat 90. let je výsledkem rostoucího zájmu o emocionální a afektivní dimenzi reality. Afektová teorie zkoumá roli emocí a afektů, tedy osobního a ztělesněného, a jako taková vzbouzí zajímavé ontologické, epistemologické a metodologické otázky. V mé teoretické bakalářské práci věnuji některým z těchto otázek prostřednictvím interdisciplinárního a kritického přístupu k tématu a zároveň tvrdím, že emoce a afekty jsou neoddelitelnou součástí lidského prožívání. Poté, co stručně odhalím, jak se k emocím a afektům přistupovalo v průběhu dějin antropologie, nejprve interpretuji a zhodnocuji charakteristické rysy současného teoretizování o afektu, abych později dospěl ke třem tematickým vektorům pro jeho adaptaci v antropologii. Docházím k závěru, že teorie afektu nabízí užitečný způsob, jak emoce a afekty více provázat a začlenit do antropologického výzkumu.</p>
<p>Klíčová slova:</p>	<p>afekt, afektivní teorie, Deleuze, dynamická ontologie, emoce, vztahová ontologie, Spinoza</p>
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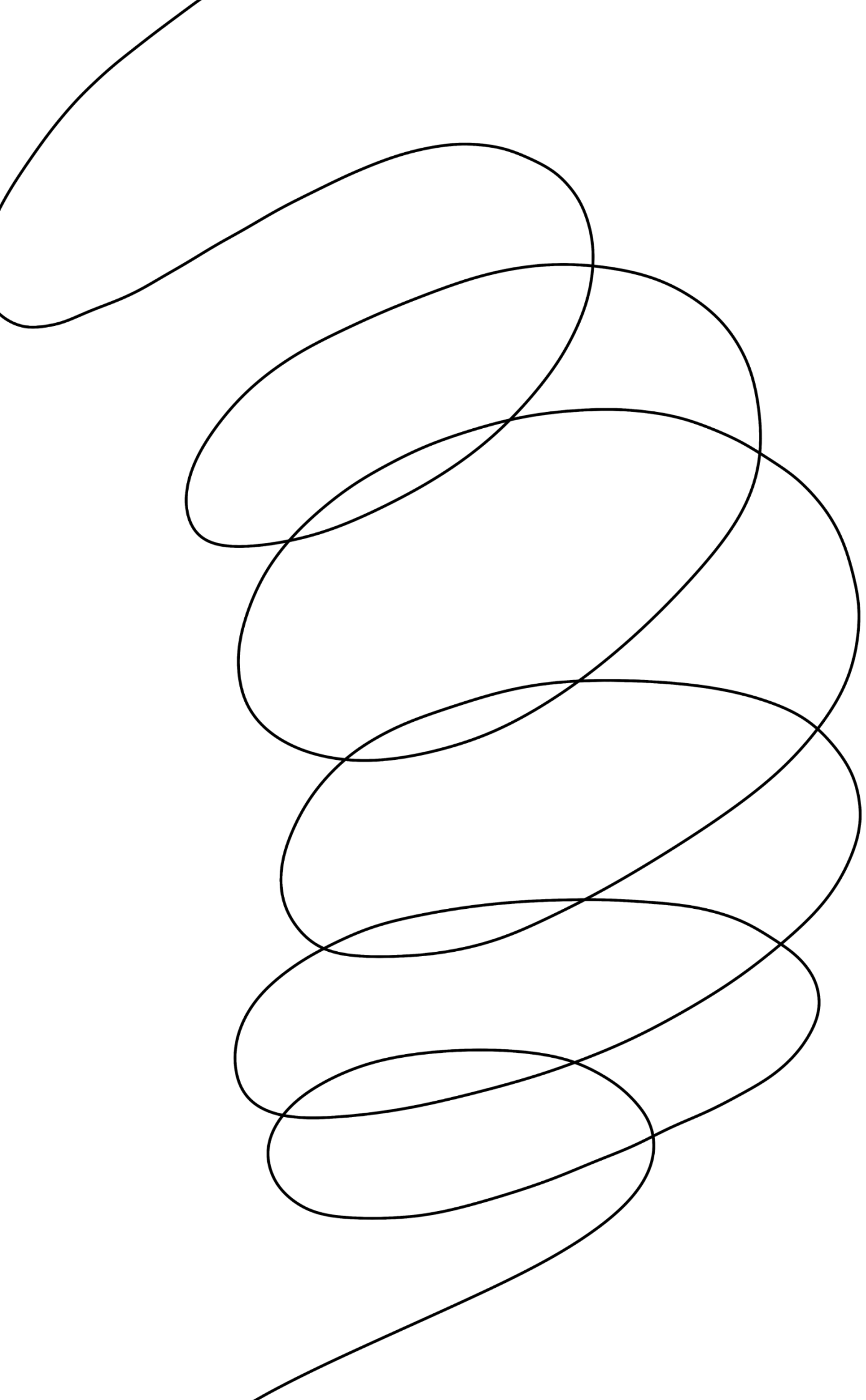
La vie qui est la vie de quelque chose, est bonheur. La vie est affectivité et sentiment. Vivre, c'est jouir de la vie.

– Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totalité et Infini*



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INTRODUCTION

What inevitably comes within the experience of reality is its emotional and affective dimension – it feels and it is felt, it affects and it is affected. Things are pleasant or unpleasant, exciting or dull. Undoubtedly, there is also a certain emotional intensity behind this thesis – an affective origin, a desire for knowledge, which has led me to this very point where I present to you the results of my theoretical inquiry. If the emotional and affective dimension of experience is inevitable, what does it mean for anthropology, for which the exploration of reality is the alpha omega? What does it mean for its theory and its method? For its knowledge production in general?

In the history of anthropology, emotions have always been pushed aside into the realm of psychology and have often escaped its subject, method, and scope. To be interested in emotions was often to psychologize, which was considered a vice that tended to be discouraged outside the field of psychology. However, an increasing interest in the emotional and affective resulted in what is now called the affective turn. Since about the 1990s, scholars across the humanities have begun to pay more attention to what is an intrinsic part of human life, but which has long been suppressed by the pursuit of scientific rationality and objectivity. In this thesis I question the role of emotions and affects in anthropology. I uncover what is hidden under the notion of the affective turn and explore the implications such turn has for anthropological practice. Attempting to engage with contemporary debates in the field of affect theory, my main objective is to provide the reader with basic account of its conceptual framework together with thematic vectors for the adoption of emotion and affect in anthropology.

Although this work operates only on the theoretical plane, this topic stems from nowhere other than the ethnographic field. My main inspiration has been the practice of basic anthropological methods during field research conducted with classmates in North Bohemia, but also my personal experience with the academic environment. In my studies, as well as in my personal and academic development over the last few years, I have come to realize how important source of knowledge the dimension of the emotional and the affective can be. How my study life and my very thinking have radically altered under the influence of affective otherness in my study program in Groningen, the Netherlands, or how my debating skills have been affected by the

environment of, for example, the philosophy department of my alma mater. These and other experiences have reinforced my belief that the emotional and affective plane should be equally combined with its awkwardly defined opposite, the plane rational. Or to put it differently, at least neither should be suppressed at the expense of the other.

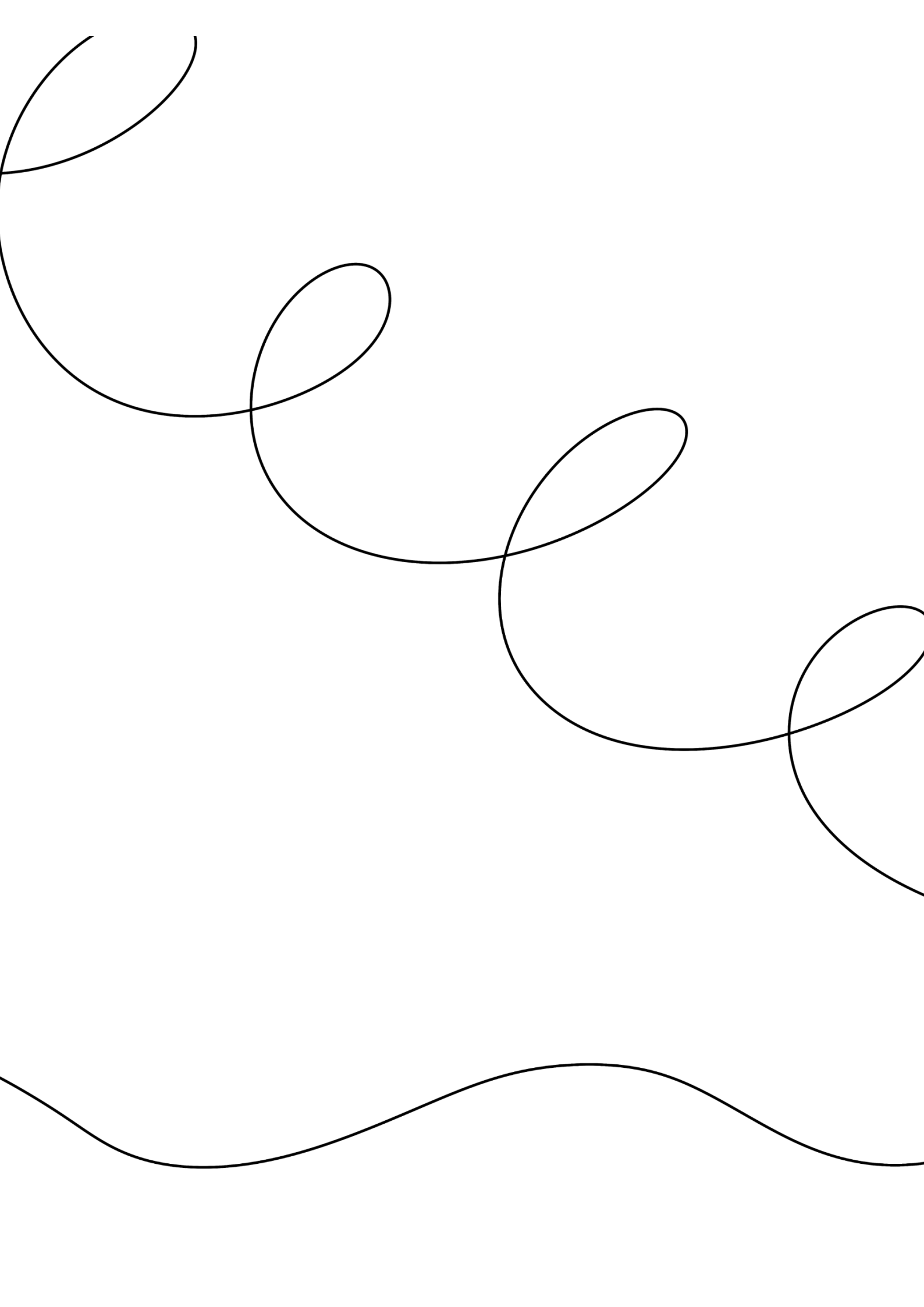
As far as my research is concerned, I have not noticed any Czech anthropologists working on the affect theory. Even in the Czech academic context in general, with the exception of psychology of course, only a few academics from various disciplines have so far joined the debate. This fact has led me to write this thesis in English, the language in which the debate is currently primarily conducted. Nevertheless, in my writing I try to mention at least peripherally the few Czech scholars of affect theory that I have come across so far. Since it is also a very vibrant theory, I draw on various aspects and corners of the humanities in my work. Finally, its fragmentary nature also justifies why my thesis draws on various collections of essays and a considerable amount of secondary literature rather than individual monographs.

Ironically, even though I have made my decision to write my bachelor's thesis in the anthropology department, I have always considered myself more of a philosophy student. Fortunately, I no longer aspire to such a distinction, as the interplay between the two disciplines has led me to believe in the necessity of an interdisciplinary approach. I think philosophy performatively, as a playground, a plateau that makes it possible to generate and imagine novel ways of thinking and being. Ultimately, before going into the field, anthropologists must equip themselves with theories, the creation and refinement of which is often the province of philosophy. Therefore, in my writing, I seek to fulfill this ideal of interdisciplinary interplay.

The thesis at hand follows this structure. Chapter I provides a very general introduction to the conceptual apparatus, followed by a brief discussion and historical perspective on how the understanding of emotions and affects has evolved throughout the history of anthropology. The main goal of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the broader contextual framework of the topic. Chapter II distinguishes between two main strands of affect theory, one inspired by the philosopher Benedictus de Spinoza and the other inspired by the psychologist Sylvanus Tomkins.

The Spinoza-inspired branch is considered more appropriate and relevant to anthropology and is therefore described in more detail. The purpose of this chapter is to set the stage from which the following, central chapter of this thesis emerges. Chapter III thus constitutes the main part of this thesis, where three thematic vectors are introduced, representing the methodological and theoretical implications of the adaptation of affect theory in anthropology. The chapter aims to demonstrate how various proposals of the affective theory could potentially alter the anthropological practice. The final Chapter IV serves as a discussion section in which some additional ideas are proposed that either elaborate on some points of the thesis, offer a different way of theorizing, or provide a constructive criticism.

The very formal and aesthetic aspect of this thesis is worth a final mention in this introduction. From the beginning, writing about the emotional and the affective urged me to test the affective aspect of the writing medium itself. As I am fully aware that the main purpose of a bachelor's thesis is primarily the application of skills acquired through study, I have tried to keep this experimentation and testing at bay. Nevertheless, the pages of this thesis are illustrated by original drawings that manifest yet another plateau of thinking, their very own plateau, in the background of this work.



1 DRAWING THE LANDSCAPE

In this opening chapter of my thesis, I want to introduce the reader to the contextual and historical landscape of the study of emotions in anthropology. Anthropology has had a somewhat peculiar relationship with emotions throughout its history, and a brief exploration of the dominant schools of thought, together with their representatives, reveals the nature of such peculiarity. For that reason, I open my thesis with a discussion on emotion as a phenomenon. Since one of the goals of my thesis is to move the debate into its affective dimension, I aim to outline the relationship between the concepts of emotion and affect in order to point out their similarities and differences. Now, let me start with an interpretation of the terms as they are commonly encountered – a clarification which might facilitate further reading and orientation in the concepts and the topic in general.

1.1 Emotion and Affect as Concepts

Emotion, affect, feeling or sentiment, are just some words that are related to that specific, emotional area of experiencing reality. The concept of emotion in particular, but also the other concepts related to it, are essentially contested, meaning that there is persistent disagreement in the scientific community about their definitions (see Adolphs et al., 2019; Barrett et al., 2016). I believe, however, that it could be agreed upon that emotions affect *us* all, or better say affect *it* all. This specific and liminal dimension of reality is not just a fable delusion of some individuals, but rather acts as the elephant in the room – it is central to the experience of reality which simultaneously causes its “elephant-like invisibility” (Beatty, 2014, p. 546). Emotions are obvious but elusive, at times all-important or completely irrelevant. No matter in what light they appear at the moment, they cast tangible shadows that imprint into the way they are conceptualized and theorized. Although there is no scientific consensus on the definition of emotion and affect, some distinctive features might be depicted at least to have a common ground to relate to. Another background plain on which the following interpretation is built.

In its most general sense, the term emotion stems from the Latin *emovere*, which translates as to move out/away, stir up or agitate (Harper, n.d.). Etymologically, the

word suggests a change or movement. More specifically, emotions could be defined as “upheavals in experience” (Slaby & Scheve, 2019b, p. 42), or concrete instances of pleasant and unpleasant feelings (see Barrett, 2017). These concrete instances have been named, classified and categorically labeled since antiquity, and distinct emotional and affective episodes such as fear, love, anger, shame, joy, agony or suffering, to name a few, have become clear icons, often dramatically expressed and



represented in arts (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Hagesandros, Athenedoros & Polydoros. (ca. 1st Century B.C.E). *Laocoön and His Sons*. [Marble sculpture]. Museo Pio-Clementino. (Photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen, 2009)

However, comparing the etymological movement- or change-like meaning of the word with the time-framed and concrete-like instances, it prompts one to say that the

original meaning is more consistent with the underlying feeling and its changing pleasant and unpleasant nature. Whereas emotion is a complex and intersubjective cognitive representation of feeling, feeling is an internal and bodily process of an individual. In emotional experience, an instance of emotion is felt.

Actually, I would go as far as to argue for giving up on the concept of emotion, particularly because of its complex and complicated nature, and focus more closely on the underlying process of feeling. Although this reveals my personal inclination, abandoning the concept entirely would likely be impossible and unproductive, as emotions are still “deemed essential to social interaction” (Slaby & Scheve, 2019b, p. 42). In this respect, as I show later, shifting focus to affect theory and its terminology offers a fruitful conceptual base on which the term emotion serves as a complementary concept still beneficial to anthropology.

Affect, on the contrary, is much simpler concept than emotion, closely resembling the notion of feeling.¹ In the field of affective science (see Davidson et al., 2003), it can refer to the basic sense of feeling, ranging from, again, pleasant to unpleasant (called *valence*), and from idle to activated (called *arousal*) – whether it is a pleasant feeling or fatigue after a hike, a sleepy, neutral or energized feeling after waking up in the morning, or simply “a gut feeling that someone is trustworthy or an asshole” (Barrett, 2017, p. 72).² In other words, how each moment is felt is assessed on a relatively simple, yet spectral scale of valence and arousal. But despite this, affect is still somewhat complicated due to the misleading context of the word itself and its many definitions used in different disciplines. Both of these problems cause misunderstandings, which I want to address next.

Firstly, in the current use of English, the term affect is commonly intertwined with, if not completely confused with, the term emotion. This is especially evident with *affection*, its derivative form. The term *affection* usually refers to an affectional relation to someone or something (Cambridge University Press, n.d.), but the original

¹ Affect and feeling are caused by an ongoing process called *interoception*, a brain’s representation of all bodily sensations. However, whereas “interoception is a fundamental feature of the human nervous system,” the reason why people experience the sensations caused by interoception as affects is still “one of the great mysteries of science” (Barrett, 2017, p. 73).

² The modern conception of affect was primarily developed by one of the fathers of modern psychology, a German physiologist Wilhelm Wundt. For his conception of *affective elements*, or *simple feelings*, see Wundt (1897/1998).

term affect has a much wider range of definitions that may not be conditionally intertwined with emotion (cf. Oxford University Press, n.d.). Secondly, affect takes on different meanings as acquired in various disciplines. For instance, in linguistics it can translate as an attitude or emotion that a speaker brings to an utterance, in rhetoric as the responsive, emotional feeling that precedes cognition, or in pedagogy attitudes, emotions, and values present in an educational environment. What these approaches have in common is that they either confuse affect with or subordinate it to emotion, or that the word affect simply refers to anything emotional.³

These and other similar approaches are influenced by what I call *the traditional psychological approach to emotion and affect* – whereas affect, as described above, is based on *the progressive psychological approach* – where a line is drawn between the two concepts, with affect being understood as a basic sense of feeling that underlies or is superior to emotion. Either way, psychological perspectives prefer to conceptualize affect within the scope of the individual or, in other words, as a property “of the individual human body and its psychological functioning” (Slaby & Scheve, 2019b, p. 45). For this reason, this thesis pursues a philosophical understanding of affect that, while similar to the modern understanding of affect in psychology, offers a broader range of conceptualizations that can be utilized in anthropology.

Finally, although philosophy is the point of departure for affect conceptualization in this thesis, I find occasional detours into the psychological realm inevitable. After all, the aforementioned traditional psychological perspective in the understanding of emotion is one of the reasons why the engagement with emotion has been somewhat peculiar in the history of anthropology. A point I attempt to outline below through some of the dominant schools of thought and their canonical representatives.

1.2 Affect and Emotion in Anthropology

Many anthropologists have shown “that emotions are inextricable elements of thinking, speaking, and acting; and that we ignore them at our peril” (Beatty, 2014, p.

³ See Barrett (2017, p. 376) who points out the errors that this confusion has caused in a number of experiments across various disciplines.

546; see also Leys, 2011, p. 436). However, for most of the brief history of the field, the concept of emotion has not been a proper subject of theoretical interest, and once it has become discussed in places, “[i]ts integrity as a concept has been assumed, its cross-cultural identity taken for granted, its empirical role in social processes either scorned or obscurely acknowledged as fundamental” (Beatty, 2014, p. 546). A selective acquaintance with some of the authors of the main anthropological schools of thought thus reveals, on the one hand, “a patchy recognition of emotion, often amounting to neglect; on the other, a failure in reporting a critical lack of detail” (Beatty, 2014, p. 546). In addition, an underlying tendency can be traced in the history of anthropology to balance between macro-theories, where the individual is overshadowed by larger assemblages and structures, and micro-theories, which place more emphasis and detail on individual. Now get ready for a really brisk and fast-paced ride through anthropological history.

Speaking of macro-theories, the forerunners of modern anthropology were the authors of evolutionary anthropology and ethnology, such as Edward Burnett Tylor, Lewis Henry Morgan and James George Frazer (Eriksen & Nielsen, 2013, Chapter 2). Despite differences in their main areas of interest, such as the focus on culture and stages of civilizational progress, questions regarding belief, kinship, modes of social organization or religion, etc., these authors were linked by a common emphasis on evolutionary theory, which formed the fundamental basis of their research, including the understanding of emotions.

On the dichotomous classification of different approaches to emotions outlined by Lutz and White (1986), these anthropologists fall between materialists, positivists, and universalists.⁴ They understood emotions as material things, as biological determinants that underly and partly conduct human action and behavior. Particularly in Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* (1871/1920) was such understanding considerably seamless and straightforward. The physical nature and the audiovisual (vocal and facial) manifestation of emotion was so obvious, according to Tylor, that it only required “an observer or a looking-glass to prove it” (p. 166). This belief further led him to utilize emotions in his conception of emotional and imitative language.

⁴ Lutz and White (1986) identify a total of five different dichotomous approaches or tensions: materialism and idealism, positivism and interpretivism, universalism and relativism, individual and culture, and romanticism and rationalism.

Similarly, nor was the distinction between emotions and feelings problematized – in this regard, it is questionable what Morgan (1877/1985) meant by claiming that intermarrying between various African clans and tribes, such as the Ashiras, Aponos, Ishogos, and Ashangos, brought about “a friendly feeling among the people” (p. 382). Was it a feeling shared by all members of the community; a feeling shared generally as a kind of collaborative atmosphere? Or was it a concern of specific individuals? The lack of detail in this case is evident as there is limited or no deeper insight into how such a feeling was constituted in people and what value, if any, people attached to it – insight that could potentially problematize the whole analysis. Although the following generation of anthropologists radically opposed the axiomatic approach to cultures and criticized its ethnocentric and superior attitude, their understanding of emotions, with some (Boasian) exceptions, remained more or less the same.

While evolutionary authors are considered among the forerunners of modern anthropology, authors such as Bronisław Malinowski, Franz Boas, Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown and Marcel Mauss are widely acknowledged as its founding fathers. Again, their projects and areas of interest were extremely diverse, but what united these authors was the aforementioned critique of their predecessors along with their evolutionary and cultural historical agenda (Eriksen & Nielsen, 2013, p. 48). Although those authors took the major steps “off the verandah” (Beatty, 2014, p. 546) and into the field, into the participatory and observatory, closer to the individual, emotions still often remained outside the stories they told. A closer look at some of these authors may serve as an example.

Regarding the above methods, Malinowski’s book *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922/2014) is an excellent illustration of their application and a manifesto for modernist anthropology in general. While equipped with theory, what really helped Malinowski polish the subject, method, and scope of his expedition to the Trobriand Islands was the method of participant observation with its vast amount of rich description. However, according to Beatty (2014), “what worked for the *kula* did not work quite so well for emotion” (p. 547). Although there are situations in Malinowski’s ethnographies that are explicitly emotional (see Beatty, 2014, p. 547), what is usually left are only the sociological cases, the back-stories are filtered and nothing remains of “the way emotions are constituted or experienced in an exotic

setting” (Beatty, 2014, p. 547). On the one hand, this is not surprising, and Malinowski cannot be blamed for it either. He is, after all, the main representative of functionalist anthropology, whose primary concern was with other issues, such as the basic needs of the individual in relation to culture and the environment. Further, Malinowski’s engagement with psychology (especially psychoanalysis) was similarly framed and anticipated by questions of the functionalist school (see Malinowski, 1927/2001).⁵ On the other hand, emotions were not completely ignored by Malinowski, but only relegated to the personal milieu of his diary – diary which, after all, played an important role for generations of anthropologists to come, and to which I return in a moment.

Taking a step back in history, although movements like historicism and diffusionism were no better in their approach to emotion, Boas plays the role of a notable exception.⁶ Despite a different focus and emphasis on other issues, such as the problem of nature and nurture and the elaboration of the ideas of cultural relativism, Boas (1911/1938) at least more often drew attention to how emotions (or their repression) affect reality:

In our intense life, which is devoted to activities requiring the full application of our reasoning powers and a repression of emotional life, we have become accustomed to a cold, matter-of fact view of our actions, of the incentives that lead to them, and of their consequences. (p. 227)

Boas’s doctrine of cultural determinism and diffusionist ideas thus influenced generations of his students, the so-called Culture and Personality pioneers such as Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead (Eriksen & Nielsen, 2013, Chapter 4). With them, emotion and personality really came to the fore – the coin flipped and emotions slowly came to be understood not as material and universal, but rather as idealistic, relativistic, and culturally influenced phenomena. Unfortunately, what remained more or less equally problematic was that these anthropologists also took the concept of emotion and its objective status for granted. As Beatty (2014) puts it, “their

⁵ For the record, however, Malinowski’s theoretical views were formed by the already peripherally mentioned Wilhelm Wundt, a representative of the modern conception of affect in psychology.

⁶ By comparison, the main proponent of diffusionism, G. Elliot Smith (1924, pp. 63–64), understood emotions rather pejoratively as something inferior and instinctive – as something man had to learn to control in order to distinguish himself from animals.

concern was not with what emotions *were* but what they *did*; how they were shaped by everyday routines; how they moulded the ethos” (p. 549) – emotions were clarified and synthesized into generic and not person-specific but culture-specific passions.

In the theoretical circles of structural functionalism led by Radcliffe-Brown, the distancing from emotions was probably even more pronounced. Avoiding the biological and natural, British anthropologists preferred broader affective concepts (such as solidarity, hostility, respect, etc.) or what they also called social sentiments (Beatty, 2014, p. 548). Following the central figures in French sociology, such as Émile Durkheim, they focused primarily on social facts – psychological facts passed down the drain of the theoretical sink. Several years later, in the environment of French sociology and mainly through the influence of the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1962/1963), emotions were rejected altogether:

Actually, impulses and emotions explain nothing: they are always results, either of the power of the body or of the impotence of the mind. In both cases they are consequences, never causes. The latter can be sought only in the organism, which is the exclusive concern of biology, or in the intellect, which is the sole way offered to psychology, and to anthropology as well. (p. 71)

Although it cannot be said that emotions are rejected completely with Lévi-Strauss. Within his acceptance of the Cartesian absolute separation of body and mind, however, emotions were regarded as cognitive contents, as products of the mind, and hence as mere effects. Lévy-Strauss thus “cut out much of what the ethnographer can observe” (Beatty, 2014, p. 548) and his legacy influenced a number of upcoming anthropologists with an influence that reverberates anthropological theories to this day.

To summarize what has already been a truly brisk historical expedition, I want to come back to Malinowski’s diary, posthumously published in two editions as *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term* (1967/1989). It covers the period of Malinowski’s life when he conducted fieldworks in New Guinea and the Trobriand Islands. Although it was never intended for publication, nor does it contain data essential to his research, it provided anthropologists with a behind-the-scenes glimpse into Malinowski’s personal life, and his raw experience of the field. The

diary served Malinowski primarily as a kind of tool for preserving his personal integrity, but also as a space for venting his inner frustrations. Both editions of the diary are prefaced with introduction by Raymond Firth, who, twenty years later in the newer edition, reflects on the impacts the publication of Malinowski's diary had on anthropology. While the content of the diary does not play such an important role here, it is Firth's notes that serve as the summarizing and concluding points of this chapter.

Although Firth in his own work limited himself in any coverage of emotions "because of a preconception about what might count as psychology" (Beatty, 2014, p. 548), his later introduction to Malinowski's diary emphasizes some of the most important aspects that more or less define anthropology's current stance on emotions. In general, Firth (1967/1989) comments on the contribution of Malinowski's diary as follows:

It is not merely a record of the thinking and feeling of a brilliant, turbulent personality who helped to form social anthropology; it is also a highly significant contribution to the understanding of the position and role of a fieldworker as a conscious participator in a dynamic social situation. (p. xxxi)

Apart from the heated debate sparked by problematic passages in Malinowski's diary, its publication resembled a general tendency that have prevailed in anthropology since the 1960s and that might be described as "a distinct trend towards trying to understand what an anthropologist produces by reference in part to his own personality and relations with the people (Firth, 1967/1989, pp. xxvii–xxviii). Whereas anthropologists of interpretative and symbolic anthropology (e.g. Clifford Geertz, Victor Turner, etc.) focused on writing thick texts whose in-depth interpretation promised cultural description and understanding, the following generation of postmodern anthropologists (e.g. James Clifford, Paul Rabinow, Vincent Crapanzano, etc.) was generally rather sceptical of such modes of representation and description. Even the very notion of culture and its writing was subjected to criticism. The problematization of the tension between what counts as objective culminated in the so-called crisis of representation, in which the very topic of the emotional and the affective becomes a topic in itself through the rising demand for reflexivity.

Reflexive anthropology anticipated, as Firth (1967/1989) puts it, a clearer recognition “that the position of an ethnographer is not simply that of a recorder of the life of a society, but is also that of someone who both affects that life and is affected by it” (p. xxviii). To affect and be affected. Although Firth probably did not use this figure of speech with any particular significance, in this thesis it represents one of the founding premises for understanding the emotional and the affective. Moreover, what Firth (1967/1989) noted by saying that fieldworkers and ethnographers “too turned out to be human – all too human” (p. xxix) resonates with other later but similar approaches that, for example, portray the fieldworker as a “vulnerable observer” (Behar, 1996). While the recognition of emotions and affects through reflexivity is one thing this thesis touches on, it is the theoretical consideration of how to grasp emotions and affects theoretically that is the main focus of the following chapters.

Although I could go much deeper into the historical perspective and, for example, examine more closely the subfield of anthropology called cognitive and psychological, such an effort would miss the purpose of this chapter. My aim has been to suggest to the reader how the understanding of emotions has changed throughout the history of anthropology but has remained more or less problematic. Encounters with selected major schools or their representatives have shown that anthropologists tended to either neglect emotions or approach them without any substantial consideration. With a final discussion of the themes and pitfalls associated with emotions in contemporary anthropology, this chapter essentially ends where the turn to affects begins.

2 AFFECTIVE TURN

Even if only fragmentary and with the risk of oversimplification, I showed in the previous chapter that emotions have always been part of anthropological writing. What differed fundamentally, however, was the degree to which they were included in writing and also the way in which emotions were framed and conceptualized. The growing trend of interest in the emotional is evident along historical lines from evolutionary writers to those of interpretative, psychological and cognitive anthropology, culminating in what is called the affective turn of the 1990s. A turn in which scholars of humanities turned their attention to the specific aspect of social reality described in particular by the concept of affect.

In the introduction to the collection of essays called *The Affective Theory Reader* (2010), editors M. Gregg and G. J. Seigworth offer a twofold way of categorizing the various contemporary currents and orientations of the affective turn. The first way is much more general and emphasizes the two different trajectories the affective theories have taken; the second way is rather more detailed, aiming for a brief characterization of eight different (but sometimes overlapping) affect orientations. Perhaps this may be a teetering-on-the-edge situation yet again as the authors themselves are very cautious about any general classification of the theory. As the following quotation suggests, it is impossible to trace down a single string of influence that applies generally or to all current currents:

There is no single unwavering line that might unfurl toward or around affect and its singularities, let alone its theories: only swerves and knottings, perhaps a few marked and unremarked intersections as well as those unforeseen crosshatchings of articulations yet to be made, refastened, or unmade. (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 5)

Those “swerves and knottings” and “marked intersections” Gregg and Seigworth mention could still, however, serve as signposts on the blurry roadmap that leads to the delineation of some approaches of the affective theory(s). In order to proceed towards the main aim of this thesis and to move towards questions considering the implications, utility, and place of the theory within cultural anthropology, a rigorous investigation of the multiplicity of approaches to the theory would only lead down a path off the beaten track. In what follows, I draw on the first classification mentioned

above, which emphasizes two different trajectories – a philosophical tradition inspired mainly by Benedictus de Spinoza and a psychological tradition inspired mainly by Silvan Tomkins. I argue that the Spinozian trajectory is theoretically more appropriate and relevant for the purposes of anthropology, which is why I describe it in more detail later.

2.1 Two Different Trajectories

As mentioned above, Gregg and Seigworth make a distinction between two dominant vectors of the theory: the first inspired by philosophy of Benedictus de Spinoza and Gilles Deleuze, and the second developed in the field of psychobiology, mainly by Silvan Tomkins. While here their classification serves as a useful overview for further contextual interpretation of the theory, it should be emphasized, however, that such distinction has also been criticized by some contemporary academics.

For example, Alphen and Jirsa (2019b) argue that “it is no longer accurate to distinguish the two main strands within the turn to affect” (p. 2) due to their mutual entanglement and overlapping. It is questionable, however, if such distinctive classification has ever been truly accurate at all. As seen above in the case of Gregg and Seigworth, they both are rather skeptical about the classifications they offer. Furthermore, where Alphen and Jirsa (2019a) talk of “competing frameworks” (p. 3), Gregg and Seigworth (2010) believe that while being not easily reconciled, both frameworks “can be made to interpenetrate at particular point and to resonate” (p. 6). It cannot be denied that van Alphen’s and Jirsa’s critique hits the header at some point.⁷ On the other hand, however, it also cannot be said that the distinctions drawn by Gregg and Seigworth and other authors (see Clough & Halley, 2007; Herzogenrath, 2023a; Leys, 2011; Low, 2016; Slaby & Scheve, 2019a; Wetherell, 2012) aimed for accuracy. Rather, their goal seems to have been to generalize and thus potentially classify the theory, to draw a map – the same reason I employ the distinction here.

⁷ Their critique points at the critical discussion about the affect’s clarity and meaning “as a phenomenon, as a critical concept, and as an analytical tool” (Alphen & Jirsa, 2019a, p. 2). An issue I address in Chapter III of my thesis. For the record, Alphen and Jirsa follow Eugenie Brinkema, a leading theoretician of affect in media studies. In her *The Forms of the Affects* (2014), Brinkema has developed affective theory into its formal form that locates specific forms of affect.

I have already suggested that one of the trajectories outlined by Gregg and Seigworth is probably less relevant to the anthropological field. Again, this does not imply the complete exclusion of one of the frameworks as they overlap at some points. However, the exclusion of one of the branches sets the stage for a further and more detailed interpretation of the theory.

The line of thought I want to push aside is the Darwinian psychobiological branch of Silvan Solomon Tomkins and Paul Ekman, which has been followed and elaborated by humanities scholars such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003), Daniel Lord Smail (2007), and many others.⁸ Both vectors of the theory, one inspired by Tomkins and Ekman and the other inspired by Spinoza and Deleuze “utilize neurobiological research to bolster their arguments” (Low, 2016, p. 152). But while the former conceptualize affect in terms of innate-ist and hardwired manners, the latter “locates affect in the midst of things and relations (in immanence) and, then, in the complex assemblages that come to compose bodies and worlds simultaneously” (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010, p. 6). To support my assumption about the Spinoza and Deleuze-inspired vector being more relevant for anthropology, I offer two arguments against the branch inspired by Tomkins and Ekman.

Firstly, behind the Tomkins’ realm of biologically hardwired-like affects lies the assumption of the *classical view of emotion* (Barrett, 2017, p. xii), also known as the *basic emotions paradigm* (Leys, 2011, p. 439). According to this view, emotions (or affects respectively) are understood as the “artifacts of evolution” (Barrett, 2017, p. xi), a biological and universal components of human nature. On the basis of this theoretical assumption, Tomkins and his colleagues developed a method which aimed to objectively measure and capture so-called *basic emotions* through facial expressions (Barrett, 2017, p. 5).⁹ Believing that each basic emotion is as unique as a fingerprint, objectively distinguishable through the specific muscle contractions of the human face, their findings and experiments established a model, a paradigm, that until recently dominated the field (Leys, 2011, p. 440). Until recently, indeed, as it

⁸ The evolutionary aspect of Tomkins and Ekman's approach to affect is very much like the materialist, positivist, and universalist anthropological approach to emotions described in Chapter I of my thesis.

⁹ The six basic emotions were anger, fear, disgust, surprise, sadness and happiness (Barrett, 2017, p. 5). However, the number of the “basic emotions” or “affect programs” may vary elsewhere (see Leys, 2011).

has been largely discredited by recent findings, particularly in the field of neuroscience.

In her book *How Emotions Are Made* (2017) Lisa Feldman Barrett introduces a radically new perspective on the science of emotion. Drawing on the latest findings and practical examples, she introduces the reader to her theory of constructed emotion, arguing that emotions are not unique and distinguishable physical fingerprints, but rather are constructed and variational:

In every waking moment, your brain uses past experience, organized as concepts, to guide your actions and give your sensations meaning. When the concepts involved are emotion concepts, your brain constructs instances of emotion. (Barrett, 2017, p. 31)

Based on her theoretical proposal, Barrett offers a comprehensive summary of empirical evidence that is inconsistent with the picture set by the basic emotions paradigm while also discrediting Tomkins' and Ekman's experiments and findings.

Secondly, when it comes to the study of emotions and affects, Ekman's experience with different tribes and cultures around the world might at first seem to make him particularly appealing to anthropological practice (Hoffman, 2008). Ekman and his team conducted experiments with tribes such as the Minangkabau people of West Sumatra or the Fore people of Papua New Guinea to corroborate the universalistic implications of the basic emotion paradigm.¹⁰ Following Tomkins' method of "emotion recognition" (Barrett, 2017, p. 7), they assumed that facial expressions are universally recognizable by people from all around the world which, in my view, is in sharp contrast to some ideas maintained in cultural anthropology.

Cultural and social anthropology differs from physical or biological anthropology by virtue of its characteristic distancing from biological determinants – it has aimed to study the social and the cultural, not the biological, hardwired or *innate-ist*. On the other hand, I have already mentioned that both branches of the affect theory

¹⁰ By that time, anthropologist such as Margaret Mead (1937/2017), Ray Birdwhistell (1970) or Edmund Leach (1972) were already in a strict opposition with Ekman's account (see also Capocasa et al., 2016). They regarded emotions as cultural-specific and learned in the process of socialization, attributing them almost exclusively to the realm of culture. Mead (1975) even criticized the reliability of Ekman's methods and the video recordings he and his team had taken for analysis.

somewhat rely or bolster their arguments on the (neuro)biological. However, it makes a difference how is the biological theorized about. On the one hand, it can either deepen the dichotomies it establishes or can favor one component over another, or on the other hand, it can go beyond the dichotomies and look for complementarities between different components, frameworks and approaches. Returning to Barrett (2017), there the dichotomy between culture and biology loses its meaning completely as she bases her theory on social, psychological and neuroscientific flavors of constructivism:

From social construction, it acknowledges the importance of culture and concepts. From psychological construction, it considers emotions to be constructed by core systems in the brain and body. And from neuroconstruction, it adopts the idea that experience wires the brain. (p. 35)

In other words, what once might have been considered a more predominantly psychological or biological field of inquiry, it is precisely the interdisciplinarity what pulls the study of emotion closer together with other scientific fields. It is the *in-betweenness* which is so familiar to the Spinoza and Deleuze-inspired theories of affect. Let me now turn to the very basic ideas of Spinoza's philosophy that form the backbone of any further affective theorizing in this thesis.

2.2 Concepts in Spinoza's Philosophy

The roots of Spinozian strand of affect theory begin mostly with Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677/1985). This monumental treatise touches upon almost every major area of philosophy, including a discussion of the nature and role of affects in humans.¹¹ Spinoza's conception of affect, however, is embedded in his rather complex philosophical system. Although his version of affect may differ slightly from the one I want to present in the thesis at hand, his specific theoretical conception (together with his metaphysical/ontological theory) provides a key inspiration to affect

¹¹ For a more detailed introduction to Spinoza's *Ethics*, I refer the reader, for example, to Steven Nadler's *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction* (2006).

theorization.¹² On Spinoza's philosophy later elaborates aforementioned Deleuze in his works such as *Expressionism in philosophy: Spinoza* (1968/1990), *Spinoza: Practical philosophy* (1970/1988), but also in *What is philosophy?* (1991/1994), co-authored with his long-standing fellow colleague Félix Guattari. In what follows, I illuminate the very basic concepts of Spinoza's philosophy through the lens of Deleuzian interpretation to arrive at *relational* and *dynamic* understanding of affect – a “non-representational understanding” (Simpson, 2021; Thrift, 2008), which might be utilized and appropriated in anthropology.

Perhaps the first important characteristic of Spinoza's philosophy is his ontological conception of *substance*, which falls within the domain of *neutral monism*¹³, and follows from one of Spinoza's definitions:

By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, i.e., that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed. (Spinoza, 1677/1985, I def. 3)¹⁴

The definition implies that the substance must be “truly ontologically independent” (Nadler, 2006, p. 55) and Spinoza refers to it as either *God or Nature* (lat. *Deus sive Natura*), with no actual difference between the two. Since “[...] there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature [...]” (Spinoza, 1677/1985, I prop. 5), there are only so-called attributes of the one and only infinite substance. The *attribute* refers to a similar thing as substance, although the two terms emphasize somewhat different properties. As Nadler (2006) puts it, where “[...] ‘substance’ refers to its ontological status, [...] ‘attribute’ refers to the fact that it has a distinctive character or nature” (p. 57). Attribute is thus an essential, determinable, and underlying property of all things, or, in other words, “the nature that underlies all of its properties” (Nadler, 2006, p. 56). According to Spinoza (1677/1985), it refers to “what the intellect perceives of a substance as constituting its essence” (I def. 4). While it is a matter of interpretation how important is the difference between those

¹² Although the terms ‘metaphysics’ and ‘ontology’ refer to the traditional classification on *metaphysica specialis* and *metaphysica generalis*, they are so similar that I prefer to use them as synonyms, with a preference for the term ‘ontology’.

¹³ Neutral or substantive monism is one of the general premises of metaphysical theories in the philosophy of mind. On the one hand is the traditional dualism of mind and body (Cartesian) on the other is monism, either in its material, ideal or neutral form.

¹⁴ Abbreviated references to Spinoza's Ethics follow the standard format of parts (I–V), definitions (def.), axioms (axi.), propositions (prop.), and others.

two concepts (see Nadler, 2006), the third Spinoza's ontological category, mode, is of greater importance here. By *mode* Spinoza (1677/1985) means "[...] the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived" (I def. 5). In other words, modes are the actual, differentiated and finite entities derived from a substance. A mode could be a page of a book, a "concrete manifestations of the attribute or nature constituting the thing" (Nadler, 2006, p. 58). It is in the definition of mode where the notion of affections first appears.

However, to make things even more convoluted, it is necessary to distinguish between *affections* (lat. *affectio*, *affectiones*) and *affects* (lat. *affectus*). And for this to be possible, two other central concepts that are of particular importance to anthropology have to be at disposal – *striving* (lat. *conatus*) and *power* (lat. *potentia*).

In Spinoza's philosophy, striving is like an inertia in motion. It is the innate and essential property of things to strive for and maintain their existence. According to Spinoza (1677/1985), "[e]ach thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being" (III prop. 6). The notion of power is thus similarly inherent in things. Connecting the various concepts together and coming back to the difference between affections and affects, all power is thus "inseparable from a capacity for being affected, and this capacity for being affected is constantly and necessarily filled by affections that realize it" (Deleuze, 1970/1988, p. 97). In other words, where *affectio* refers to "a dynamic relational ontology" (Slaby & Mühlhoff, 2019, p. 29) associated with the notion of modes, their relations and their striving and power, *affect* refers to a particular designation of affection for something which might be depicted as a state or action of either an internal or external cause that increases or reduces the power to act. As such, affects might be separated on individual and characteristic phenomena, or what "in current terminology is referred to as emotion" (Slaby & Mühlhoff, 2019, p. 29).

At this point, I would not be surprised if the reader finds this a bit puzzling. Have I not already drawn some general conceptual distinctions between affect and emotion in Chapter I of my thesis? And have I not just made it seem like that even in Spinoza's philosophy such distinction does not really hold together since "affects must be drawn or extracted from affections" (Cross, 2021, p. 6)? Whereas it is true that Spinoza, just like Tomkins, aimed to categorically identify affects as

distinguished emotions, his conception is one way or another underlined by the relational, dynamic, and power related (pre-individual) nature of affections. In this sense, the putative contrast between emotion and affect becomes somewhat unhelpful as some authors argue (Slaby & Mühlhoff, 2019, p. 33). Although I agree with this, it is only possible to dilute this contrast once the specific ontology is introduced. In other words, so far it has been necessary to play the interpretation safe and keep the concepts separate in order to carefully reach the tipping point. Among other things, the relational ontology is also more in line with the current approach in the affective science, which I have already discussed through Lisa Barrett's theory of constructed emotions. The relation ontology of affections thus goes on to be the primary inspiration for the contemporary Spinoza-inspired affect theorization in the social sciences.

3 ADOPTING AFFECT IN ANTHROPOLOGY

After introducing the main philosophical background with insight into Spinoza's philosophy, I shall outline some strategies for adopting the relational and process ontology associated with Spinozian and Deleuzian understandings of affect. In the chapter "Affect" (2019) social philosophers Jan Slaby and Rainer Mühlhoff summarize and characterize the Spinozian-inspired affect along the lines of three thematic vectors. Those vectors are a relational ontology, a constitutive interplay of affect and being affected, and a dynamic and polycentric understanding of affect. While they provide an excellent summary for potential applications and understanding of affect, a closer look at these vectors may also reveal deeper connections between affect theory and anthropology, as well as stimulate further discussion of possible implications.

3.1 Relational Ontology

As relational, affect is never done or formed as a molded readymade component. On the contrary, affect is always in-between things, in the middle of other objects and individual entities. It is the underlying and relational process of Deleuzian *becoming* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, Chapter 10) and not-yetness that affects and influences the individual. Similarly, the individual is understood as a "transiently stabilized node in an encompassing relational dynamic and thus constitutively entangled with other individuals and a shared formative milieu" (Slaby & Mühlhoff, 2019, p. 30). Additionally, the relational ontology and Spinoza's conception of 'attribute' go hand in hand with his parallel understanding of mind and body where one cannot be superior to the other. In other words, as Deleuze (1970/1988) puts it, "what is an action in the mind is necessarily an action in the body as well, and what is a passion in the body is necessarily a passion in the mind" (p. 18). This so-called "ontological parallelism" addresses the long-standing issue of oppositional Cartesian

dualism, in anthropology commonly framed as binary oppositions (in structural jargon) or dichotomies.¹⁵

One might ask, then, what are the most important implications of the underlying assumption of relational ontology for anthropology and anthropological writing? The answer would probably vary with respect to different fields and disciplines of anthropology but let me suggest at least those points that I consider the most general.

I believe that the relational and processual nature of affect requires a significantly heightened level of sensitivity to the affective processes on the part of researchers and relations to their objects of study, participants, environments, etc. On the side of anthropologist, this calls for a complex reflexivity of her or his affectual capabilities and attributes. According to such an ontology, the very situational repertoires that researchers carry with them into the field are constitutively entangled with the objects of their studies in the sense of formative milieu. In other words, the very idea of the drive or desire to investigate problematic aspects of reality and subsequently produce knowledge has an affective dimension in it (see Stodulka et al., 2019). I further elaborate and problematize reflexivity in the following vector, where this plane has even more explicit implications.

Similarly, the role of sensitivity extends to anthropological writing alone, which should also be understood as affective, since “affect is not simply a result of writing, but rather, part of the writing process itself” (Fleig, 2019, p. 178). The relational ontology also suggests a cautious approach to representation, a topic I have already touched upon in the Chapter I of my thesis. The problematization and possible retreat from rigid forms of representation thus leads to an openness towards experimentation, novel forms of writing, and “new perspectives” (Herzogenrath, 2023b) on academic writing in general. Such affective experimenting is particularly present, for example, in Kathleen Stewart’s *Ordinary Affect* (2007), where she traces and figuratively represents the affective intensities of the ordinary, of the everyday life, and where she “tries to slow the quick jump to representational thinking and evaluative critique” (p. 4). Her fascination with the complexity and uncertainty of

¹⁵ There is already a large body of publications in Anglo-Saxon literature focusing on the critique of dualistic thought and Western rationalism in general. In the Czech academic context, I refer readers to publications that have inspired my work, such as Horáková (2012) in anthropology and Koubová (2019) in philosophy.

objects, or with the relational and processual, completely transforms the objectives of her writing, or as she herself puts it:

My effort here is not to finally “know” them [the objects of her study] — to collect them into a good enough story of what’s going on — but to fashion some form of address that is adequate to their form; to find something to say about ordinary affects by performing some of the intensity and texture that makes them habitable and animate. (Stewart, 2007, p. 4)¹⁶

Another example could be Deborah Gambs’ “Myocellular Transduction: When My Cells Trained My Body-Mind” (2007) where she pushes the experimental writing even further, playfully, poetically and even stylistically and graphically exploring and in a sense overcoming the aforementioned Cartesian dualism of the corporeal and the conceivable, and the dualism of the me and you, of the us and them. Gambs’ provocative autoethnographic account of dualities or Stewart’s sensitivity towards the ordinary are among the examples that are, like manifestos written by artist-philosophers, “marked by a transformative power that goes beyond rhetorics, beyond the operations of meaning-production and subjectivity” (Herzogenrath, 2023a, p. 182). For these authors, form defines function – writing no longer serves only as a tool of symbolic and factual representation, but as a method that reflects the very nature of what is being written about.

Finally, other related concepts such as *affective resonance*, *affective community*, or *affective atmosphere* emerge from the relational ontology (see Slaby & Scheve, 2019a). In particular, the concept of atmosphere has already shown great theoretical and methodological utility and is elaborated especially in Setha Low’s book *Spatializing Culture* (2016). There Low introduces the concepts of affective atmosphere and affective climate that allowed to examine different kinds of data and social interactions associated with critical discourse analysis of “fear talk” in fieldworks conducted in a number of American gated communities. Besides that,

¹⁶ In the context of Czech academic writing on affect, this is reminiscent of Tomáš Roztočil’s article “The Liminaut: Lost and Found in the Field” (2022). There, the spatial researcher himself, co-formed by her or his studied environment, becomes what Roztočil calls the “liminaut”, a figurative persona representing the researcher’s situatedness in the process-oriented study of both theoretical and physical space. Like Stewart, the author’s objective is not to present a concrete set of conclusions, descriptions or representations, but rather to embrace and explore the dynamics of the relational and processual.

however, she also argues that those concepts serve as theoretical and methodological tools that “query the connection of local and national or global feelings and how affects generated at the national level can infiltrate the everyday spaces of home and neighborhood” (2016, p. 173).

Underlying all the other theoretical consequences, the proposal of relational ontology is probably the most important characteristic of Spinoza influence, with ontological parallelism being “an important background axiom to an understanding of affect as social micro-dynamics” (Slaby & Mühlhoff, 2019, p. 31). In this thesis, it represents the first methodological vector, the adaptation of which has far-reaching theoretical and practical implications, as I have shown in the examples provided.

3.2 Constitutive Interplay of Affect and Being Affected

The relational and processual nature of affect reflects also in its characteristic interplay of affecting and being affected. The modern understanding of causality as transitive is understood here as immanent – rather than the idea of a chain-like causation between entities, it is a vibrating oscillation and resonance where “active and receptive involvement are inseparable” (Slaby & Mühlhoff, 2019, p. 31). As a result, a processual understanding of affective relations shifts the focus from a vertical understanding of the power to affect (who affects whom) to a horizontal understanding of the affective processes themselves (how such relations evolve in given situations). Moreover, as far as another pressing issue in anthropology is concerned, these relations are not limited to a purely anthropocentric framework, since affective dynamics involve both human and non-human entities:

[T]he unfolding of an affective dynamic is not reducible to properties of only one of the involved individuals. The way one individual is affecting and being affected in a situation co-depends on all the other participating individuals, both human and non-human alike. (Slaby & Mühlhoff, 2019, p. 31)

As I have mentioned in the previous vector, the role of reflexivity becomes even more explicit with emphasis on the constitutive role of affective processes. In that sense, the researcher does not take a controlled and thoughtful step of the verandah

but rather is always thrown into the field where the processes of affecting and being affected flow and unfold spontaneously. The question arises, how to reflect such dynamic processes of becoming without falling back into categorical thinking, but at the same time avoiding the pitfalls of autopoietic pathos?

So far, I have put on the Spinozian dynamic and relation concept of *affectio* on a pedestal before the more categorical concept of *affectus*. However, as I have already suggested in Chapter II with Alphen and Jirsa, the analytical and critical capacities of *affectio* are limited (and call for experimentation), for example in the case of reflection, where a representative form of description could potentially provide additional valuable data (as seen in the case of Low's fieldwork). This problem is neatly addressed by Jiří Anger (2018, p. 12), who similarly describes affective theorizing as either negative (i.e., non-representational and abstract form of *affectio*) or positive (i.e., representational and categorical form of *affectus*), while at the same time questioning to what extent a positive definition of affective forms could be productive and useful. Thus, here again, the twist of diluted opposition between emotion and affect comes to the fore.

In *Affective Dimension of Fieldwork and Ethnography* (2019), Stodulka et al. explore the role of researchers' emotions and affects with its solely practical implications in fieldwork.¹⁷ Drawing on neutral monism, traditional empiricism and radical empiricism, the notion of emotion and affect is interchangeable in their approach. They propose a methodology of *empirical affect montage* that aims to systematically analyze affective experiences through the training of distinct skills and methods, or as they put it:

Training fieldworkers' emotional literacy (the capacity to discern and name affective experience in relation to someone or something), by encouraging techniques to document their emotions systematically, promises to enhance researchers' emotional reflexivity and support affective ways of researching, reflecting and representing "the field" as ethnographic knowledge. (Thajib et al., 2019, p. 9)

¹⁷ For the record, in the book's introduction, they go as far as to argue that affective relations "enable more than they hinder processes of anthropological and social scientific knowledge construction" (Thajib et al., 2019, p. 8).

Given all of these considerations, positive elaboration of affects and, for that matter, emotions, offers a complementary source of data for anthropological research. One way or another, however, this approach should be conditioned first and foremost by the relational and processual ontology of *affection*. Indeed, returning to the theory of constructed emotions, all existing and future taxonomies of emotion categories and episodes will face the same problem, namely their essentially ideological and culturally and socially shaped nature. In other words, as Barrett puts it in her debate with Adolphs (2019), “[t]he inability of scientists to discover objective functional criteria for emotional states is not a bug — it is a feature of what emotions are and how they work” (p. R1063).

The second vector thus elaborates the implications of relational ontology, particularly in the context of reflection and understanding the role of affective engagement of individual entities. More importantly, it emphasizes that affective dynamics are shaped by structural constellations and specific relational environments. As such, it represents the second methodological vector presented in this thesis, the adaptation of which again has a number of both theoretical and practical consequences.

3.3 Dynamic and Polycentric Understanding of Power

As far as the last vector is concerned, it emphasizes the interconnection of affect with the concept of power. Analysis and understanding of power in cultures, societies, tribes, communities, and many other social formations is an integral component of nearly every anthropological study. Its understanding and conceptualization is often adopted from various disciplines outside anthropology (e.g., sociology, philosophy, etc.) and its various forms are embedded in concepts such as *hegemony* (Gramsci, 1971), *power-knowledge*, *governmentality* or *biopower* (Foucault, 1954–1984/2001), and *cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 1972/2010), to name a few. It is certainly unique to anthropology that sources of power are usually understood as indirect, oblique or as “hidden-in-plain sight” (Niezen, 2018, p. 2), much like Spinoza’s affect, which, in this respect, is “intimately connected with – even identical to – an understanding of

power” (Slaby & Mühlhoff, 2019, p. 32).¹⁸ Power as polycentric is understood as the active and receptive capacity of individual entities where affects are both expressed and modulated by individuals in a given environment. It is the underlying *potentia* that locates each individual in dynamic power-relations of affecting and being affected. This is where the transformation of ontogenesis and individuation of various entities (whether common objects or human actors) must also be considered and framed in terms of dynamic production and subsequent continuous alternation.

Additionally, an *extensive* and *temporal* dimension can be distinguished within the dynamically understood individuation (Slaby & Mühlhoff, 2019, pp. 32–33). On one hand, the extensive dimension refers to every individual entity as also constituted by and embedded in different social configurations and structures – non-linear structures in the sense of Deleuzian *rhizomatic* networks (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, Chapter 1). Such potentially fruitful structural framing, however, does not lead to a passive or power-deprived rendering of the underlyingly heteronomous individual, but merely reveals and acknowledges varying degrees of relation to such structures. On the other hand, the temporal dimension acknowledges the individual’s historicity, or their own past experiences with relations of affecting and being affected. Therefore, the capacity or potential to affect or be affected in an individual “is a result of a kind of bodily and environmental repository for specific patterns of affectivity in past relations” (Slaby & Mühlhoff, 2019, p. 33).¹⁹ Such temporal dimension thus draws attention to the account of historical ontology of a subject, an *affective disposition* (Slaby & Scheve, 2019a), or what closely resembles with concepts such as *structure of feeling* (Williams, 1977) and *techniques of the body* (Mauss, 1973) or *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1972/2010).

Finally, the implications of dynamic and polycentric understanding of power are most pertinent to the field of political and economic anthropology – especially since the political dimension of affect is not something derivative or sub-disciplinary, but affect itself “directly carries a political valance” (Massumi, 2015, p. vii). Here again,

¹⁸ However, anthropology has not always understood the sources of power indirectly or hidden in the multitudes, planes or assemblages. For a brief historical development of the concept, I refer the reader to Ronald Niezen’s article “Power” (2018), a summary and postcolonial critique of some traditional approaches in anthropology.

¹⁹ This is what Beatty (2014, p. 552) calls the “biographical” dimension of experience, or the sedimentation of personal and circumstances that build over time and affect the “emotional experience and the course of relations between people”

other concepts such as *affective economy*, *immersion* or *political affect* emerge and offer a conceptualization of the affective and emotional in political and economic contexts (Slaby & Scheve, 2019a). As a great example serves the collection of essays *Privilege, Agency and Affect* (2013) by editors Claire Maxwell and Peter Aggleton. There, the role of affect and emotion is discussed in terms of privilege, agency, domination, and social justice, but also, for example, in terms of the institutional production, reproduction, negotiation or restriction of the emotional and affective. These planes are then subjected to analysis across various power or hierarchical structures, such as academy, education, family, and community in general.

In the last vector, the dynamic and polycentric understanding of power thus emerges from both of the previous vectors, generating a final thematic and methodological plain of potential application of affect theory.

I believe that perceiving affect (and affect-related concepts) through the lens of these three thematic vectors offers a novel and useful theoretical gaze on the affective and emotional dimension of human experience that anthropology has so long excluded or at least pushed aside from its domain. Finally, the implications outlined in this chapter prompt in-depth investigation of further implications and applications of affect theory in anthropology. Through the few examples I give, I believe that affective theory offers an important contribution and that it can occupy an increasingly useful place in anthropological inquiry.

4 DISCUSSION

This closing chapter of my thesis serves as a repository of ideas that I could not incorporate into the main body of my writing but nevertheless played a role in the composition and evaluation of my arguments. These ideas either elaborate on some of the points I have made in the text, offer a different approach to the topics discussed, or provide a constructive criticism. In what follows, I very shortly outline these ideas, which could also serve as suggestions and inspirations for further both theoretical and practical investigations.

4.1 Related Processual Encounters in Anthropology and Beyond

The ideas of relational and processual ontologies expressed in the three thematic vectors in Chapter III are far from new in anthropology, and it is probably useful to point out those theories in which anthropology has already encountered similar theoretical and methodological proposals. These include especially actor-network theory (ANT), speculative realism of object-oriented ontology (OOO), and other theories associated with so-called “ontological turn” (see Jensen et al., 2017; Kohn, 2015; Niemoczynski, 2017).²⁰

Although being more loosely related to the implications of relational and dynamic affect theory, ANT has a number of similarities, particularly with the notion of relational. This is not surprising, though, as it has similarly been inspired by Deleuzian philosophy, and has not been far from being named “actant-rhizome-ontology” (Jensen et al., 2017, p. 527). As a material-semiotics theory, ANT assumes that relations between entities are both material and semiotic, and that those relations are constantly shifting. In other words, it assumes that human and non-human actors are mutually entangled in a generation of knowledge and that any novel knowledge is ontologically transformational – it changes “the actual composition of the world” (Jensen et al., 2017, p. 527). Particularly appealing to anthropological practice is the theory’s goal to move beyond anthropocentric evaluations of non-human actors,

²⁰ As broad as the ontological turn may be, Casper Bruun Jensen (2017) sums up its various positions neatly when he says that it is the study of practical ontologies that “are about how worlds are concretely made, conjoined or transformed by co-evolving relations of multiple agents; people, technologies, materials, spirits, ideas, and so on” (p. 528).

however, as a theory heavily dependent on a structural approach with its ideal of network extensibility, it also raises concerns among some anthropologists of a “metatheory” that robs reality of its plurality (Jensen et al., 2017, p. 529). For a relatively widely utilized theory in anthropology, which is no coincidence as its main promoter and developer Bruno Latour has been one of the most prominent anthropologists of our time, it represents an important nexus and intersection of ideas and approaches that could be subjected to further study.

As for the second theory, the role of OOO in relation to affective theory is rather complicated. Although Graham Harman (2018) acknowledges that ANT and Latour’s work have been a source of inspiration for him, the main representative of OOO criticizes both Deleuzian and Latourian approaches. Similarly critical towards anthropocentrism, OOO is based on the so-called “flat ontology” which, as Harman (2018) himself puts it, “*initially* treats all objects in the same way, rather than assuming in advance that different types of objects require completely different ontologies” (p. 54). That means, in contrast to ANT, that OOO is genuinely interested in the nature of things rather than their relations. Additionally, it perceives objects as “withdrawn”, meaning that the reality of objects “is always withdrawn or veiled rather than directly accessible, and therefore any attempt to grasp that reality by direct and literal language will inevitably misfire” (Harman, 2018, p. 38).²¹ On these grounds, Harman criticizes Deleuze for “undermining” and Latour for “overmining” the reality of objects, meaning that their ontologies reduce or devalue objects in either upward or downward direction (Jensen et al., 2017, p. 534).

In the contemporary field of speculative realism, there are many other theories that are similarly concerned with ontology and that are even closer to the theoretical assumptions of the affective theory presented here. Of particular interest might be ideas proposed by authors such as Jane Bennett (2010, 2020) and her vital materialism of “vibrant matter”, process-based approaches by Steven Shaviro (2012, 2014), or pragmatic naturalism of Leon Niemoczynski (2011).

²¹ The notion of “withdrawn” of objects has been coined by the German phenomenologist Martin Heidegger in his *Being and Time* (1927/1962) and is related to his understanding of objects as ready-to-hand (ger. *Griffbereit* or *Zuhandenheit*).

In summary, however, it is questionable to what extent could be the more philosophical ideas useful for anthropology. Although some of the ontological concerns have been already proved useful with prominent writers and anthropologists such as Donna Haraway (1991) and Anna Tsing (2015), those ontologies focusing radically on the “withdrawn” of objects from all relations have clear limitations – as for what would be left of anthropological inquiry without relations and the relational.

4.2 Other Directions and Critique

It is also possible that the affective turn is the wrong turn, as Andrew Beatty suggests in his book *Emotional Worlds* (2019). There he pleads for a narrative approach to understanding emotions and proposes an emotionally engaged anthropology which outweighs the experience-distant theorizing by “the knowledge acquired and deployed, often thoughtlessly, in the human encounter that always exceeds the bounds of theory and gives the lie to airy abstractions” (p. 14).

Although Beatty's approach does not fully answer the questions regarding the complex and problematic nature of emotions that I have discussed primarily in Chapter 1 of my thesis, his oppositional approach puts affective theory in a critical perspective. In chapter eight of his book, Beatty (2019) expresses his main concerns and formulates a set of questions as a critical response to affect theory:

My chief concern, however, is to road test the affect concept. How does it work in the field? Does it open up new ground? Does it overlap with ‘emotion’ or have nothing to do with it? Does it require a different approach to fieldwork? Is the ‘turn to affect’ a wrong turn, a chimera? (pp. 220–221)

While I think I have already answered some of his concerns in my thesis, I would accept these questions as important milestones for any further study of affective theory and its especially practical relationship to anthropology and ethnography.

As a final point of discussion, I would like to mention criticism that has been raised by some feminist authors. In a rather general critique of postmodern discourse, Mascia-Lees et al. (1989) argue that the so-called “new ethnography” inspired by postmodern tendencies serves as a stylistic way of maintaining the patriarchal

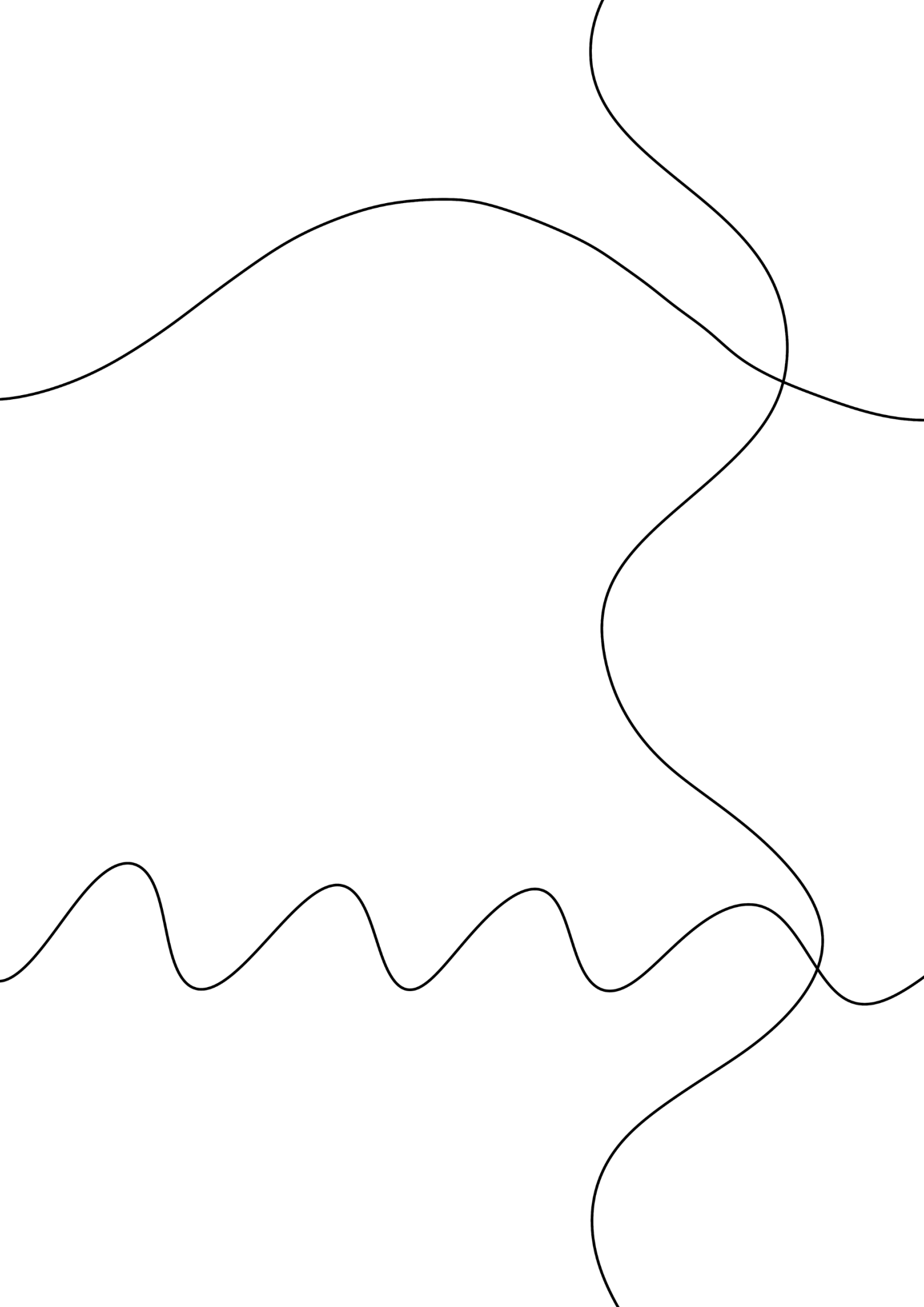
politics and overall male dominance of the Western discourse. According to them, feminism serves as a better theoretical framework for ethnography because it has been concerned with the relationship between the dominant and the “other” since its beginning, and therefore feminists fundamentally “speak from the position of the ‘other’” (1989, p. 11). Their critique raises more questions than it answers – questions that I cannot elaborate on here. Nevertheless, I believe that the feminist positions and the positions of the contemporary directions of affective theory do not have to be mutually exclusive. In any case, feminist critique serves as a final impetus for further critical reflection on affective theory.

CONCLUSION

If the emotional and affective dimension of experience is inevitable, what does it mean for anthropology, for which the exploration of reality is the alpha omega? What does it mean for its theory and its method? For its knowledge production in general? These are questions I have asked at the very beginning of this thesis. *Répétition* creates *différence*. Especially if the interval before yet another repetition has been filled with the contextual. Although these questions are intentionally posed broadly, I believe that the interdisciplinary thesis at hands answers a considerable part of what is being asked.

If anthropology seeks to capture the emotional and affective, that which cannot be excluded from the experience of reality, it needs the appropriate tools to do so. However, these tools should reflect how dynamic and processual reality itself is. How dynamic and processual are the very relations between individuals, entities, or objects, that reality facilitates. The Spinoza and Deleuze-inspired affective theory does not only offer these tools, but also a vibrant research field within which these tools can be refined. In this thesis, three thematic vectors address some of the methodological implications of emotionally and affectively engaged inquiry. These vectors include the theoretical and practical implications of relationally based ontology, constitutional role of affecting and being affected, and dynamic and polycentric understanding of power. The implications of the adaptation of these vectors in anthropology are demonstrated by several examples that at the same time elaborate the conceptual potential of the theory.

I have shown that among the most important contributions, but also challenges, of affective theory is its processual, dynamic, and non-representational orientation. The theory embraces what is inherently so elusive and invites prudence in the categorical classification of emotional and affective contents. As such, it calls for heightened sensitivity on the part of the researcher, for equality between the presumably rational and the irrational, and for the exploration of experimental forms of representation. Far from being an exhaustive theoretical exploration, the thesis concludes with a discussion of possible directions in which a deeper engagement with the emotional and affective dimension of reality in anthropology might take.



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FIGURES

Figure 1: Hagesandros, Athenedoros & Polydoros. (ca. 1st Century B.C.E). *Laocoön and His Sons*. [Marble sculpture]. Museo Pio-Clementino. (Photo by Marie-Lan Nguyen, 2009). Retrieved March 10, 2023, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laoco%C3%B6n_and_His_Sons