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The Affective Dimension

By

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Painting

2013
This volume is presented as a record of the work undertaken for the degree of Master of Visual Arts at Sydney College of the Arts
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Abstract

Studio

The studio work presented for examination deals with conveying affect through an exploration of imagery related to the concepts of the location of affect in the body, affect resonance and affect as event and intensity. Twelve paintings will be exhibited at the Sydney College of the Arts Post Graduate Exhibition in December 2013. The paintings are based on a narrative sequence of imagery that is primarily imagined and also sourced from a variety of media. The media of the work is gouache, watercolour and ink on canvas and paper supports. The configuration of the paintings is determined by both the narrative sequence of the work and the dimensions of the gallery space.

Research Paper

This research paper explores the area of affect in relation to art. To investigate this area the paper will features a select group of artists who employ the mediums of painting and drawing, namely: Mamma Andersson, Marlene Dumas and Maria Lassnig. The discussion around these artists focuses the way in which each develops a personal language to conveys affect. In each case they use these strategies to heighten the works’ overall affect, feeling and emotion. This paper explores the area of affect, displayed in these instances, and in turn discussed by a number of philosophers including Brian Massumi with reference to his commentary of affect as being located in the Body and affect as a sensation and event and Silvan Tomkins on affect as a resonance. Through this dual investigation of artists and theorists, the paper highlights how painting can convey affect. It also positions the studio work as in relation to this investigation of affect through developing a personal language in painting that is part of contemporary practice.
Introduction

Figure 1. Francisco Goya, *Saturn Devouring One Of His Sons*, 1821-23, 143.5 cm x 81.4 cm, mixed media, mural, Museo Nacional Del Prado.

When I was little (about four of five years old) I used to love looking through books with pictures in them, particularly from my parent’s library of history and art books. There was a book with an image that I would return to again and again despite it scaring me so much I could barely open the page to look and I would have nightmares about it. The image was of Francisco Goya’s ‘Saturn
devouring his children’, and my Dad ended up having to hide the book from me to stop me from looking at it and then that giving me more nightmares. I was drawn to it and would be in suspense as I reached that section of the book where the image was contained, in a strange way I somehow felt fear but also an adrenaline response in suspense and then the intensity of the horror of the image. What can be made of this? There is the intensity or affect of the horror in this image that had a big impact on me. I was only starting to read and write at this age so you could say I was maybe too young to understand the description or put into words the right language that would describe what this image conveys but I could and did still respond strongly to the affect of the painting. I remember distinctly how the image for me was beyond words and how I could not place one particular emotion on its subject, but I could definitely register its overall intensity. There is also the curious aspect to my returning again and again to the book to see the image, there was something I found incredible in the power of the image to create the affective response I felt. There is a paradoxical relationship within the affect experience that allows a weird incongruence of emotions, happy is sad, pain is pleasure.

When I think about what moves me the most of all art forms, I always return to music. Music for me is the most intense experience of how art can move one to a feeling state. Its ability to be affective and transport one to a feeling state is what I find magical about it. This has always been my overriding motivation in making art. I have thought to only create something of music’s power to convey affect through a visual medium is there in the greatest of artworks. What music does so well is to communicate and create affect and this is a movement that exists in the body moving both into and beyond language. I am interested in this movement quality of affect. Its power or intensity lies in its ability to motivate feeling and emotion. This is a relationship of transition and change that is cyclical and constantly changing.¹

I have recently been diagnosed with Bipolar II which is a mood disorder. This mood disorder is characterised by frequent fluctuations in mood (which means basically emotional state). I am required to take mood stabilizers to help regulate the fluctuations in mood I experience. Untreated for over ten years, I have had many bouts of depression and have been unable to understand their origin until now. As a result I have always been acutely interested in emotions and affect and how as an artist I can convey this through my work. What has ‘moved’ me most greatly in the work of other artists and what inspires me is the ability to convey ‘Affect’ and ‘mood’. It perhaps has a strange irony that this representation and manipulation of ‘emotion’ and ‘affect’ in my work is in stark contrast to my ability to regulate emotion and affect within myself.

When approaching this research in my practice I have strived to develop a language to create affect. Making art and thinking about art for me has always been about a pre-lingual knowledge and experiential in nature. This has developed out of an intense relationship I have always had with making art beginning when I was very little, I have been drawing pictures for as long as I can remember. I feel that maybe this is why when it comes to putting into words what I think about art I find it very difficult, because for me it has always existed as an experience of affect, feeling, connections, holistic in nature and about sensation before anything else. I have needed to convert this understanding into an adequate language to communicate this ‘affective’ essential quality of understanding of what art is. Coming from this place of deeply felt understanding renders language somehow secondary in comparison. I have been searching for a long time to be able to put into words this experience. Studying Affect theory has been a ‘eureka’ moment because this hits on what I have been trying to say.

This MFA Project, entitled The Affect Dimension (2011-2013) presents an exploration of affect in art. I argue that a consideration of affect is of vital importance in understanding and making art and that also art can give us a unique understanding of affect and what it means, how it is important and how it operates. Affect is a paramount concern both within my work and also the context in which I frame my work in the regards to other artists. I work in a way that is defined by an affective process. The subject matter is a vehicle for a
meditation on the nature of affect. The quality of affect or intensity has an intimate pre-cursive relationship with emotion and or feeling.

The written thesis explores the concept of affect. There are many definitions of affect, for the purpose of this research paper I have selected the most pertinent theories on affect theory that resonate with me strongly and my practice of making art. I will explore affect as it relates to three key theories of affect being Brian Massumi’s theories of affect as located as sensation in the body, affect as event and intensity\(^2\) and Silvan Tompkins’ theory of affect resonance\(^3\). These theories of affect will then be explored through the works of three contemporary artists, Mamma Andersson, Marlene Dumas and Maria Lassnig. My work will be discussed in relation to how it is related in regards to these practices.

The parameters of my research are looking at affect through a very personal understanding of it and how affect relates to said artists and in turn how this relates to my work. Through using Massumi and Tomkin’s theories on affect and applying them to artists work, I plan to show through detailed case studies the differing ways they have managed affect in their work. I have chosen to only deal with a discrete survey of works in the scope of this paper to allow for a detailed analysis through specific case studies from each artist, Mamma Andersson, Marlene Dumas, Maria Lassnig.

Chapter one presents an investigation of affect and its origins and introduces key theorists and the three concepts of affect, being the location of affect in the body, affect resonance and affect as event and intensity. I will introduce the artists I will discuss in relation to these concepts.


Chapter two will explore the work of the artists, Maria Lassnig, Marlene Dumas and Mamma Andersson. Specific works from each artist will be examined in relation to the three theories of affect detailed in chapter two. I will examine how these artists have developed a personal language to convey affect in their work. The content and subject, means and methods or techniques, materials and mediums used all are driven by a core affective dimension or affective turn that characterizes or permeates the work.

In chapter three will discuss my own practice lead research. I will utilize the framework set out in chapter two in relation to the three concepts of affect to explore my own work and how I have developed my own language to convey affect. It is the affective quality that is most commented on with my work and in the work of the artists I have chosen to explore in this paper.
Figure 2. George Pencz, *The Four Temperaments (Humors) Sanguine, Choleric, Phlegmatic and Melancholic*, 1530-1562, 80mm x 53mm, engraving on paper, The British Museum, London.
Chapter one

What is affect?

“Affective experience… cannot be translated into words without doing violence to the totality of awareness…”

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word Affect as: ‘have an effect on; make a difference to’ and “to touch the feelings of; move emotionally”. The Merriam Webster dictionary defines affect as “the conscious subjective aspect of an emotion considered apart from bodily changes also: a set of observable manifestations of a subjectively experienced emotion”.

However in what has become known as ‘Affect Theory’ there is no general consensus or one overarching definition on the meaning of affect. The one thing that stands out in agreement between theorists is the idea of affect’s quality of movement. Affect can be seen as a space of ‘opening out’ and change, a space of transference and movement. This space is a liminal ‘in-between-ness’ of transition that defies easy categorization. In order to understand the contemporary meaning of affect I will give a brief history of the term and introduce some key theorists and ideas that have developed over time.

The word Affect originates from the 14th Century and comes from the word Afectus in Latin. To truly understand what affect means we must go back through history to the origins of our understanding of emotions. One ancient theory of understanding the body was developed by the philosopher Hippocrates (460 BC-370 BC), who believed the body to be made up of


divisions; these divisions were called the Four Humours. The humours were fluids that moved throughout the body, contained in the blood and related to temperaments/affective states, elements, colours and planets. The four humours were: Blood which was Sanguine, cheerful, the element air, dry and hot, Yellow bile was choleric, angry, fire, dry and hot, Phlegm which was phlegmatic, sluggish, water, wet, cold, and Black bile which was melancholic, sad, earth, wet and cold. It was believed that the balance of all four humors was necessary for both physical and emotional health and overall temperament.

The other division in the body was of the spirits, specifically ‘animal spirits.’ which is derived from the words Pneuma Psychikon in Greek and Spiritus Animalis in Latin. The Animal Spirits like the Four Humors were in the blood and influenced mood and temperament. They were believed to be made up of an ethereal, vapour-like substance. These theories were made widely known by the writings of Roman physician Claudius Galen (c 129 -216) and came to dominate for the next millennia as the main understandings of how the nervous system worked.

The philosopher Rene Descartes further developed on the idea of animal spirits in his work ‘Passions of the Soul’. Descartes believed the ‘animal spirits’

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12 Descartes is widely believed to be the forefather of modern philosophical thought. Descartes developed the idea of mind body dualism which has since been referred to as the Cartesian method of understanding self. Descartes strived to develop a system understanding of self and the world that was grounded from a place of rational understanding, as in the famous quote ‘Ergo et sum’ - I think therefore I am.
to be very fine fluid bodies that were housed in the pineal gland and were the vehicle for communication of affect between the body and mind. When activated they moved very fast from the pineal gland into the blood and throughout the body into the hollow nerves causing specific physical movements or sensations and affects.\textsuperscript{13} Descartes believed the pineal gland to be the seat of the soul, the meeting place between the physical corporeal body and the rational mind\textsuperscript{14}. The ‘passions’ were the “perceptions, sensations or emotions of the soul which we refer particularly to it, and which are caused, maintained and strengthened by some movement of the spirits”\textsuperscript{15}. The passions were made up of six basic emotions that all others derived from, these were love, hatred, joy, sadness, wonder and desire.\textsuperscript{16} ‘The Passions of the Soul’ is described as “one of the earliest non-mystical attempts at understanding normal and pathological affective states.”\textsuperscript{17} These two theories of ‘the four humours’ and the ‘Animal Spirits’ are highly influential in both our understanding of affect and emotion and the language that has developed to describe each. i.e. to say that one is \textit{moved} by something denotes the intensity of feeling experience and also the passage of affect or feeling state through the body. To say that one has a melancholic disposition describes an affective state of sadness or depression.

The forebears of affect theory is widely believed to be the philosopher Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677). Spinoza developed his work on affect from Descartes. Spinoza believed affects to be related to but not the same as emotions and

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feelings. Spinoza argued against the Cartesian view that held the mind as the source of all knowledge and argued that knowledge that originates in the body was of equal value\(^\text{18}\). Spinoza wrote ‘no-one has yet determined what the body can do\(^\text{19}\) in his work ‘ethics’. This idea is central to affect theory. Spinoza believed affects to be events that take place within the body and the body’s ability to react is mediated by the ideas of the events. Spinoza conceptualized affects as having both a cognitive and bodily component. Spinoza recognizes three primary affects which were: desire, pleasure, pain or sadness. From these three another forty subtle variations were then possible.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guttari developed their theory of affect from Spinoza and further developed the definition between affect and emotion. Deleuze and Guttari’s ‘a thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia’ gives a definition of affect as:

“ Neither word denotes a personal feeling (sentiment in Deleuze and Guattari). L'affect (Spinoza's affectus) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. L'affection (Spinoza's affectio) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include "mental" or ideal bodies).\(^\text{20}\)

Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth in *The Affect Theory Reader*, highlight two influential and important essays regarding affect in 1995 that have led to


subsequent developments in this area\textsuperscript{21}, one of them is Brian Massumi’s \textit{The Autonomy of Affect} and the other is Eve Sedgwick’s and Adam Frank’s \textit{Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins}\textsuperscript{22}. These two theorists look at affect from two different positions. Massumi is from a philosophical approach and Tompkins is from a psycho-biological approach\textsuperscript{23}. I have found both theorists to resonate with me strongly in terms of my experiences of affect, art and my relationship with my work and I will highlight these in more detail.

In ‘The Autonomy of Affect’ Brian Massumi creates a theory of affect which draws from Deleuze and Guttari’s theories on affect. Massumi argues that affect has at its basis an understanding that is sourced in the body, and is derived separately from cognition and language. It occurs running parallel to linguistic knowledge and comprehension\textsuperscript{24}. Meaning that affect is a constantly changing state of flux that has the body as its source and is not easily definable by language, it exists outside of it and precedes it.

Susan Best in \textit{Visualizing feeling: affect and the feminine avant Guard} explores a way of understanding late modern art that incorporates affect and feeling\textsuperscript{25}. Best argues that a combination of psychoanalysis and aesthetics is necessary to develop a way of thinking about affect/feeling in art of the late modern period as these factors had been ignored in aesthetic theory. Best theorizes that it is helpful to turn to psychoanalytic theory to explain what affect is and to give a language to communicate what these artists do in relation to affect. Best highlights how Minimalism was characterized as being without feeling or

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins, \textit{Critical Inquiry}, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Winter, 1995) 496-522
  \item \textsuperscript{25} Susan Best in \textit{Visualizing feeling: Affect and the Feminine Avant Guard}, (London: I.B. Tauris 2011) 1
\end{itemize}
sentiment but how in fact artists such as Eva Hesse in her work used the language of minimalism to highlight affective states and convey emotion.

Silvan Tomkins life work was ‘Affect theory consciousness’. Tomkins theorized affect to be biologically driven with a similarities to emotions in animals. They differed from Freud’s theory of the basic drives being psychological in basis and separate from the body. Tomkins argued that affect was made up of nine separate distinctive parts. Tomkins theorized that these nine affective states form the basis of all emotions, and tomkins described them in pairs, denoting two escalating levels of intensity, being: enjoyment/joy, interest/excitement, surprize/startle, fear/terror, distress/anguish, anger/rage and later also shame/humiliation and dissmell/disgust. Tomkins used photographic medium to study minute detail in expression as evidence for his theories.

What I seek to achieve with this paper is a very personal understanding of affect in relation to my work. There are three prominent ideas or three key aspects of affect I will be looking at, these are:

**The Location of affect in the body**

“When I think of my body, and ask what it does to earn that name, two things stand out. It moves. It feels. In fact, it does both at the same time. It moves as it feels, and it feels itself moving. Can we think a body without this: an intrinsic connection between movement and sensation, whereby each immediately summons the other?”

What does it feel like to live in our bodies? That is a question of feeling and sensation. From our bodies we have the ability to feel and to create affect in another. The intensity of feeling and the ability of feeling move both through us and are created from within. Art also has the ability to create affect.

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The body is vital in understanding affect, Massumi likens the skin as being like a brain in that it’s ‘sensory receptors’ receive and transmit information. Massumi gives the example of the jellyfish in nature. Massumi writes that a “jellyfish could be called its brain” because the entire surface or skin of it IS its brain: the jellyfish is a creature that has no brain and/or no centralized area, effectively decentralized, the ‘brain’ as we call it is spread out over all its surfaces. This is a very good example of the idea of affect being spread across this skin or the body as brain knowledge. This ‘allows for the intensity of an experience to be transmitted and internalized’  

‘the transmission of affect is not the exchange of affect from thing to body or body to body, it is the infolding and unfolding of intensities between the two bodies, which can be virtual or flesh. These intensities resonate apart from intended meaning or context.’  

This can be seen in contemporary art’s focus on awareness of divergent and multiple sources of knowledge and awareness.

**Affect resonance**

“If the theory movement foregrounded cognitive responses to the text and thought affective responses redundant, the “affective turn” can be understood as a willingness to return to questions of readers’ affective responses.”  

My Mother recounts a story from when I was really little, about 3 years old, where I saw something on the television, a woman was very upset. I was upset by seeing it, I said to my parents, “why was she crying?” and as they did not see

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the television/program they did not know what I meant. They tried to steer my
attention away from the subject by distracting my attention but I kept returning
to it, repeating the question over and over again, “why was she crying?. The
woman’s crying moved me in a way I didn’t understand. My Mum found
remarkable that even at such a young age I could be so moved by an image
that I could not let it go and was determined to make sense of it. This story is an
example of what Silvan Tomkins called ‘affect resonance’. Affect resonance
describes the ability and inclination of people to resonate and experience
similar affect and emotion in seeing the affective/emotional display of another.
Tomkins theorizes that this quality of affective resonance is non-verbal and at
the origin of all communication before language and is the basis for
relationships between self and other. Massumi also agrees with this theory of
affect as a ‘resonance’. In the Autonomy of affect Massumi describes a short
film broadcast on German television that caused complaints from parents that
their children were distressed by. It showed a simple wordless narrative of a
snowman being made by a man on his rooftop and then taken out into the
woods and left in the falling snow. Massumi uses this example of a visual
analogy to highlight the paramount of visual stimuli in invoking an affective
response in the viewers. This example can be more broadly applied to the
visual arts that are essentially visual in their communication with the viewer.
Another theory of Tomkins was that of theory ‘affect contagion’ which he
described as being a sympathetic communication that was visual and pre-
verbal. Tomkins also made detailed scientific/photographic studies of the face in
relation to affect and believed it was the site which primarily conveyed affect. He
used highly sensitive equipment and camera to capture miniscule minute
expressions that he believed to convey affect. Deleuze in *Francis Bacon: The
\[\text{\ref{silvan_tomkins_affect_imagery_consciousness_complete_edition_2008}}\]
\[\text{\ref{silvan_tomkins_affect_imagery_consciousness_volume_ii_1963}}\]
Logic of Sensation writes of how the painter Francis Bacon painted the corporeal ‘animal spirit’ essence of being human.  

Affect as intensity and event

“The work of art is a bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects.”

In ‘What Is Philosophy’ Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze theorize that art is “a bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects” meaning that art is a visual representation of experiential nature of feeling states. This describes a non-literal nature that defines visual art forms. Meaning that art describes non verbally feelings/emotions/sensations that are experienced by humans in the body, that make up our experiential understanding of ourselves and the world. In this quote they are likening art to being a bloc of sensations, as a physical manifestation of feeling states or sensations in the body. Art is first and foremost is a physical manifestation of the sensations felt within the body.

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33 Deleuze, ‘The Body, the Meat and the Spirit: Becoming Animal’ chapter 4 page 15

Artist Franko B’s work ‘I Miss You’ involved a performance by the artist where he walked back and forth down a runway bleeding from self-made cuts to his arms in front of a crowd of viewers. This work highlights an affective state of longing and sadness in a way that is manifest on the surface of his body and the physical endurance and suffering transmit these emotions to the viewers of the work. Massumi likens affect to a ‘manifestation of the body’s internalization of an intensity’ and also as ‘event’ that comes from awareness outside of cognition and language, and is rather is located in the sensory awareness of the skin/body. As such it cannot be translated into language or easily expressed. Affect is according to Massumi an ‘event’ that is characterized by movement and ephemeral by nature, subject to change/constantly changing or ‘undulating and reforming’.36 ‘Affect exists in the temporality of emergence. This virtual temporality is the force that gives affect its autonomy from language, sensation,

and emotion.”

Seigworth and Gregg in An Inventory of Shimmers highlight that affects being like forces that have the ability to move both through us from outside influences and also come forth from within us which operate on a level removed from cognition. They argue that affect exists in a state of “in-between-ness” that is a catalyst for intensity, emotions, and both mental and physical responses. This ‘in-between-ness’ of affect means its ability to be both a movement or exchange of intensities between people or things, that is it exists in this space.

Susan Best in ‘Visualizing Feeling, Affect and the feminine avant guard’ argues that feeling has disappeared from aesthetic discourse due to a rise in what Best calls an ‘anaesthetic ideal’. This makes the reconsideration of affect in art a necessary consideration. 1970s feminist works dealing with the body, often artists were using their own bodies in their works. The body was a contested space, both social, political, gendered. The feminist revolution augmented changes that generated much dialogue on the nature of gender and the nature of the female body. Artists were at the forefront of this movement by way of their works which often centred around a reconsidered and reconstructed gender identity. Best argues that Ana Mendieta Silueta Series utilizes a strategic use of the term ‘essentialism’ which feminist theory has derided as linking the feminine with the natural world and seen as reductionist. Here though Mendieta’s work transmits affective states through her use of visual imagery centred around the apparition like shadows and indentations of the body in various landscapes evoking absence of the body as well as a melding of the physical and the

References:


natural worlds, highlighting a deep instinctual knowledge that is precognitive and felt rather than intellectualized.

Ana Mendieta, Silueta series, 1973 -1977, Mexico

David Levi Strauss in his book ‘between dog and wolf’ in his essay aesthetics and anaesthetics highlights issues surrounding the impact of each on contemporary art practices. Levi Strauss takes as his starting point Susan Buck-Morris’s essay ‘Anaesthetics and Aesthetics’ which gives a detailed reading of concurrent histories of both concepts. The linking between these two histories draws startling parallels which had consequent effects on thinking about how

we relate to pain and aesthetics and draws parallels between medicine’s treatment of pain and aesthetic theory’s treatment of pleasure. That they both have developed in tandem, with a shared emphasis on an anaesthetic principal where pain and thus also pleasure\(^{42}\) have become devoid of meaning. Levi Strauss emphasizes the aesthetic as being a discourse that Terry Eagleton in ‘The Ideology of the Aesthetic’ writes ‘is born in the body’\(^{43}\) to which Levi Strauss adds ‘will be reborn as such’\(^{44}\). Affect theory is part of a wider movement in cultural studies and contemporary art that considerations of the subjective and the body. In contemporary art there has been an increasing move towards practices about embodiment. An aspect of this is affect. Theorist David Levi-Strauss writes in his essay ‘Anaesthetics and aesthetics’, ‘the body is the last refuge of the subjective and artists are variously defending, interrogating, and “developing” this refuge like never before’.\(^{45}\) Levi Strauss argues this return to focus on the body as subject is because it has ‘increasingly become a site of social, sexual, and political conflict’. Many of the images of bodies in these artists work are painful, with an emphasis on the subjective experience and by conveying the affective qualities, these artists reconstruct the body as an aestheticized space. In the following chapter I will discuss artists for whom the reaffirmation of the ‘felt’ is primary.


Chapter two

The artists I discuss in this paper all underscore a return to the body through the affective, emotional and feeling sensation present in their works. I have chosen to research the work of Mamma Andersson, Marlene Dumas and Maria Lassnig as artists whose practice involves different aspects of affect. These artists all create work from a basis of affect being the driving force behind making the work.

The location of affect in the body is discussed through the work of Maria Lassnig, (born in Austria, 1919). Lassnig’s work is based in developing a visual expression of an experiential understanding of the sensations of the body, as described by Deleuze and guttari’s notion of art being primarily essentially ‘a bloc of sensations’. Maria Lassnig is an artist whose work embodies Massumi’s idea of affect being bodily and outside of or before cognition and language. Her work is informed in an experiential understanding of the sensations of her body and how to express this. Lassnig works from a place she calls ‘Body Awareness’ which is a technique she has developed to delve within to produce the sensation and psychology of what it is to be human and live ‘within the skin’. Her work relates to the nature of affect as informed by sensations with the body as source of knowledge/the body as brain, as Massumi in the ‘Autonomy of affect’ likens the jellyfish to the brain, a decentralized knowledge base.

Marlene Dumas (born South Africa 1954) looks at the human body, the human condition and our relationship with it. I will explore Dumas work of in relation to the idea of ‘Affect resonance.’ Dumas work embodies Tomkins idea of affect resonance being the tendency of someone to experience the same affect and resonance in response to a display of affect/emotion by another person. Marlene Dumas, is primarily concerned with using depictions of the human form as a way to interrogate psychological and affective states. The strongest factor from viewing her work is one of affect. The depictions of skin and body infer this relationship. This object relations between Affect/affected conveys a fluidity of

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movement both within the work and out to the viewer and back again. This affect or ‘in-between-ness’\textsuperscript{47} lies integral to emotion.

Affect as an intensity and event is explored in the work of Mamma Andersson (born Stockholm, 1962-). Andersson through her work develops imagery of landscapes and interiors that are dream-like and mysterious and create overall an intense event like quality of affect. Mamma Andersson’s work embodies Massumi’s theory of ‘affect as being both an intensity and as an event’\textsuperscript{48} and ‘affect as existing in the present and contained in both bodily and virtual towards future/motivation/action.’\textsuperscript{49} Andersson through her paintings of silent visual narratives communicates to the audience affective states, in her paintings the affective quality of the work is what elicits emotions from the audience.


I. The art of sensation: Maria Lassnig

“...I do not aim for the "big emotions" when I'm working, but concentrate on small feelings: sensations in the skin or in the nerves, all of which one feels...Why does one draw the way one does at a particular moment, and not some other way? Well-a feeling doesn't have edges, and you can't quantify it. The viewer can believe in what's depicted, or not“

Maria Lassnig articulates through her work physical and psychological sensations, how it feels to live in the body, and the relationship between mind and body. What Massumi calls this ‘bi-furcation’ of the senses and cognition. Lassnig’s working methodology of feeling states represented through ‘body awareness’ an approach that is intimately vital and immediate, with no preconceived notions:

“I step in front of the canvas naked, as it were. I have no set purpose, plan, model or photography. I let things happen. But I do have a starting-point, which has come from my realization that the only true reality are my feelings, played out within the confines of my body. They are physiological sensations: a feeling of pressure when I sit or lie down, feelings of tension and senses of spatial extent. These things are quite hard to depict"  

Lassnig’s work too captures this vitality and the freshness of sensation as an event and seems to pose more questions than give answers about the nature of self. Her work in unflinching in its depictions of body, self and affect in a way that Lassnig doesn’t shy away from difficult states/emotions.

“Lassnig not only paints the great emotions such as mourning, pain, joy and happiness, but also those often neglected sentiments that take the form of a

50 Maria Lassnig in interview Artforum International 46.10 (Summer: 2008) 405-406

51 Maria Lassnig: The Location of Pictures, Deichtorhallen, (Deichtorstraße 1-2, 20095 Hamburg, Germany, 21 June – 8 September 2013) From the Press Release http://www.thisistomorrow.info/viewArticle.aspx?artId=1893&Title=Maria%20Lassnig:%20The%20Location%20of%20Pictures accessed August 1° 20123
sense of pressure, tension or one of being stretched. For her, this is often the only reality."  

In many works there is a communication of affective states that permeates through her depiction of the human form in states of incredible tension. This place of ‘affect’ in her work communicates a division between the experiential and bodily and its cognitive transcription into language, what Massumi calls a space that represents a crossroads for connections between the cognitive processes and the sensations of the skin that make up a visceral perception.

“Maria Lassnig guides viewers through the many different states of abstraction and realism to a very personal, recondite but nonetheless humorous world of perception and sentiment. Her very special approach to painting and her unique use of color contribute to this. Lassnig’s central preoccupation is that ruthless self-questioning to which she has subjected herself in different ways throughout her life. Her self-portraits can be informal, may be expressed in traumatic, surreal figures, abbreviated amalgamations of man and animal or can move through a film. We encounter human beings who have morphed into machines or who have become pure abstraction...Yet her pictures always build up a direct emotional tension between an inner and an outer world, which it is hard for viewers to avoid.”

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Maria Lassnig: The Location of Pictures, Deichtorhallen, (Deichtorstraße 1-2, 20095 Hamburg, Germany, 21 June – 8 September 2013) From the Press Release http://www.thisistomorrow.info/viewArticle.aspx?artId=1893&Title=Maria%20Lassnig:%20The%20Location%20of%20Pictures accessed August 1st 2013

Maria Lassnig: The Location of Pictures, Deichtorhallen, (Deichtorstraße 1-2, 20095 Hamburg, Germany, 21 June – 8 September 2013) From the Press Release http://www.thisistomorrow.info/viewArticle.aspx?artId=1893&Title=Maria%20Lassnig:%20The%20Location%20of%20Pictures accessed August 1st 2013
A pair of eyes intensely stare out beyond the canvas in surprise from a face that is gripped tightly from behind by what looks like red fingers. The whole head is squashed in by the fingers, suggestive of hands tightly gripping in from behind. A startled expression pervades the face as it appears to be somehow imprisoned into this ‘language grid’. Jutting out from the mouth appears like a guitar fret board which runs directly into the edge of the bottom of the canvas. There is intensity in the colour choices and immediacy of technique of paint handling that convey sensations of the body and of affect, what Deleuze and Guttari describe art to be essentially ‘a bloc of sensations’. Lassnig conveys through the imagery in her work how it feels, to live in a body, to feel, to sense the skin as an outer surface that is a place of interaction between the inner
world with the outside world and the site of the knowledge of this. The sensations of the skin as receptor conveyed in her work to make up what is a knowledge contained in the body and the difficulty in its translation with the cognitive, and this bodily knowledge’s difficulty in communication through language. The image of the gridded face describes what Massumi theory of affect as an interface or interplay between the bodily and the cognitive. The intensity of the face and pose conveys explicitly the sensation of affect. The overall feeling I get from this work is the inability to express affect/emotional states through language. There is a divide between sensation – affect and cognition. Affect running parallel to language and this meeting point between the two is somehow caught in a state of tension and flux. The title of the work ‘language grid’ further indicates Lassnigs concern with these ideas.

Figure 4. Du oder Ich (You or me), 2005, Oil on canvas, 203 x 155 cm / 79 7/8 x 61 in, Hauser and Wirth, London, Zurich, New York
A woman stares out open mouthed, a gun in both hands, one pointed straight ahead at me, the other jutted against the left side of her temple. She sits in the bare space of a blank canvas, only some outline of bright turquoise and lime green paint around the top outline of her body. There is a unflinching honesty in depiction of her body and features that convey the intensity of the affect / emotion and feeling. I remember my first encounter with her work was through images in an article on her work in an Art and America magazine and how shocked I was, I thought wow this image is hard to look at – this is a demanding image that are really difficult for two reasons, firstly because it expresses the extreme psychological space which puts the viewer in touch with a direct confrontation of our own feelings and relationship to it and secondly because it speaks strongly of the confines of the body and the conflict that can exist in the self between the mind and body. It demands engagement on a psychic level that involves a recognition of acute emotional representation/honesty. These works are thoroughly experiential and reference to Surrealism and automatic drawing which Lassnig learnt through Andre Breton. This work relates to Massumi’s idea about the body as much as the mind making up our awareness of self. What Lassnig has developed through her idiosyncratic strategy of ‘body awareness’ an approach to making paintings from a purely internal locus of control, she approaches the blank canvas with no set image or intention, but purely from a place of the internal sensation of being ‘in her skin’.


II Affect as Resonance and the work of Marlene Dumas

"I use second-hand images and first-hand emotions."57

Marlene Dumas work is informed by an awareness and references of the canon/history of painting. There is also in her work a discussion of the nature of depictions of the body and photographic medium and its relationship with painting. Dumas work succeeds in imbuing images with feeling. Her method of working often details the slow accumulation of reference images over many years to which she returns and works from as source material for her paintings. But rather than merely ‘painting/producing a copy’, she gives this strong emotional charge in the way she handles the paint and the image. They then are brought together almost as a sort of requiem or vigil to the image, giving them back their life. The materiality of her work is visibly tactile in nature, it is all about the painting surface and its similarity to the surface of the skin. The skin of the canvas becomes like the skin of the body. Dumas makes the body ‘strange again’ to allow for the ‘affect’ of emotional resonance to come forward. This inversion highlights affective response. Dumas successfully creates the ‘event’ of affect in her work through these elements. The push pull between image/representation and painting/photograph convey the constant state of motion and flux of affect’s event. “Rather than staying too close to her photographic source images, Dumas exploits the traditionally affective codes of painting, including high pitched color, fluid brushwork, and distorted rendering - and she is masterful at all three”58.

Dumas plays on this knowledge we have of both our body and our mind. ‘Paintings exist as the traces of their maker,’ Dumas has said, and it is through this subjective trace, conveying the fact that the artist is “intimately involved with


[her socially objective] subject matter," that art reaches the subjectivity of the spectator, overcoming the neutrality of the photograph, however newsworthy and socially sensational, even historically memorable, it may be. Dumas conveys through her paintings Massumi’s theorization that affect that is pre-cursive to emotions and feelings and the cognition and language we use to make sense of them.

Figure 5. Chlorosis (Love Sick), 1994, Ink, gouache, and synthetic polymer paint on paper, each sheet 26 x 19 1/2" 66.2 x 49.5 cm, MoMA Museum, New York

A grid of faces stare back in a range of emotions. The overall affect is quietly still but intense. Each face seems to convey a distinct emotional state from the next, I feel each one through an empathetic resonance. There is a light as air quality to the diluteness of the paint and the handling of the brushstrokes that betrays the intensity of the feelings depicted. The wash of pigment across the surface conveys the softness and malleability of skin. There is an economic

Donald Kuspit, Artforum International, 48.10 (Summer: 2010) 350-351 accessed August 10th 2013
abbreviation of line used for the features of each that is subtle yet startling in intensity. The faces belie the nature of the affect’s fluidity which convey an overall sensation I experience. There is an interplay between these elements as parts recede and come forward. I feel the expression of each face as soon as I set eyes on it and as I become aware of this I become aware of this empathetic element. The title Chlorosis (love sick) means in a medical sense an iron-deficiency Anaemia, primarily of young women, characterized by a greenish-yellow discoloration of the skin, also called green-sickness\(^6^0\). The title gives further evidence of the work’s intention to convey an overall state of affect, with subtle variations on the affective states of longing and hope and desire and sadness, which relates to Affect as having nine different parts that encompass key emotional states.

Figure 6. The Kiss, 2003, Oil on canvas, 40 x 50 cm, Frith Street Gallery London

A face is horizontal in kissing what appears to be the body of another. The eyes are closed and the expression is one of tender intensity. The shock of flesh made new and strange through lurid washes colours allows the autonomic sense system to register the affect of the image. There is also an incredibly strong visceral/bodily quality to the work which she achieves through the treatment of skin (in unusual colour of pale violet and brown/black that at once mimics the reality of the photograph but then also makes plain it is a painting with singular large brushstrokes to denote lines/arms/edges) of our the features and skin, and a sense of breathing to the canvas through the treatment of the oil paint like a wash/ very fine/heavy use of turpentine which gives this ethereal quality to her paintings. There is a interplay of the skin of the body, the skin of the emotional body and the skin of the painting as metaphor for self. This embodies Massumi’s idea of the dynamic nature of affect as constantly moving changing and cyclical. There is a push-pull between representation and image, photography and painting. These elements become and are metaphorical for the relationship between cognition – language and between signification and the signified as well as Massumi’s concept of the bodily as the site of affect, sensation and knowledge. I am reminded of my own body, and the affective quality of the title ‘the kiss’ a metaphor for tactile sensation and feeling as i look back at the face and body and faces in the painting.
Ill. Affect as intensity and event, the work of Mamma Andersson

'To make a concentrated feeling for something, you have to reduce it to the few small things that can tell a story. Then you can make your own history.'

Mamma Andersson’s work involves the depiction of affect as an intensity and as an event. She builds the work around this central idea of how to convey an affective state. Contained within her landscapes and interiors are intensity, a world within a world, that speaks to both the present past and future through her handling of materials, forms and content. These images are evocative of dreams and resist easy interpretation. This relates to Tomkins on affect resonance.

Her work consists primarily of paintings and drawings. Andersson’s paintings of imagined scenes and landscapes, images that are caught in a moment, through paint are frozen in time. The idea of affect as event is visualized in her work which conveys evocative scenes that relate to the intensity of feeling states. They conjure up the movement of affect by capturing moments in time that betray easy interpretation but suggest strong associations.

'Inspired by filmic imagery, theatre sets, and period interiors, Mamma Andersson’s compositions are often dreamlike and expressive. While stylistic references include turn-of-the-century Nordic figurative painting, folk art, and local or contemporary vernacular, her evocative use of pictorial space and her juxtapositions of thick paint and textured washes is uniquely her own. Her

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subject matter revolves around evocative, melancholic landscapes and nondescript, private interiors. Her work can be seen to relate to Freud’s theory that dreams are primarily depictions of affect states and also Jung’s theory of archetypal images. They veer towards a psychological and affective reading rather than mere depictions of subject. The use of incongruous features within the imagery succeeds in rendering surreal aspects of the work that deny a literal interpretation of subject.

Figure 7. Mamma Andersson, Dead End, 2010, Oil on Linen, 73x144 cm, Galleri Magnus Karlsson, Stockholm

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An image of a snow covered road leading to somewhere, obscured in the distance by a pine forest, impenetrably dark and foreboding, menacing even. Lonely, still and deep, the forest keeps its secrets. The imagery is strongly metaphoric. Tyre tracks on the road, one set leads off into the distance but a second set curve violently in the foreground, animatedly expressive, gestural in their about turn. Two small sets of footprints either side suggestive human presence now gone from the scene. The title of the work gives clues to the works meaning, ‘dead end’, a dead end for what? the passengers of the car that have left the scene? or for the viewers of the work? The loneliness of the image is palpable and highlighted through the road leading ours eyes to an obscured ending. The composition’s highlights this through the absence of people but evidence of human occupation as witnessed by the road and signposts and car tracks and footprints. The forest’s dark impenetrability is suggestive of the unknown lying ahead. The tense emotional state, dashed hopes, journey abruptly ended, the frustration of a dead end, having to turn around and go back, the gestural repetition and bold lines of the tyre marks suggestive of anger, frustration, a sudden intense reaction. This relates to Massumi’s ideas about affect as a state of ‘intensity’ and affect as an ‘event’. The event being the image of the scene of the expressive repetition of tyre marks and footprints/tracks in the snow in the landscape. This conveys the event of realisation of coming to a ‘dead end’ and having to turn back. This conveys Tomkin’s theory of ‘affect resonance’. I respond in an empathetic way to the affective quality and feeling conveyed in the image. I feel the isolation and loneliness of the image. I empathize with the frustration of the journey cut short, having to go back, the futility of reaching a dead end. I also feel the affect as an event, abstracted, a pure feeling state, I feel the coldness of the landscape on my skin, the silence and isolation that exists in this feeling I remember am reminded of my own memories of loneliness frustration and despair and the intensity of it.

A side view of a room as if a window was cut through a wall and looks into a domestic interior. Our view skewed on an odd angle, the eye goes first to a kitchen bench on the right white clean lines of drawers, all in order but a lonely shoe on the floor below gives a clue to possible discord. The lines leading us to a table and beyond what looks like a bed or sofa, crumpled fabric covering it suggestive of human presence. The cool palette and lack of figuration/human inhabitants suggestive we have caught a moment of quiet reprieve. One can almost feel the stillness and quiet, but then our eye is drawn to the top right hand corner a white table where two small bears stand in opposition each raising their paws looking like they are about to attack each other. This incongruity suddenly changes the reading of the whole scene and suddenly the title of the work 'Kitchen Fight' begins to make sense, the quiet moment becomes one of tension, aggression and anger. This enigmatic scene’s affect is one of mysterious tension and unease. I am reminded of crime scene photographs where the domestic reveals clues to an event of violence. I am reminded of Gustav Klimts moody landscapes emphasized by the use of odd framing angles – sense of mystery created. Affect as an event, the suggestion of emotional tension and confrontation, the aftermath of a quarrel, a state of affect and heightened emotional space. The opening out of space, and affect as
changing of movement, drama of bears engaged in a confrontation suggestive of our identifying with the affect expressed, the figuration in the work provides clues to the affect, the dramatic tension in contrast with the stillness of the domestic space bring our attention to the affect. The use of the bear imagery links to the idea of the ancient theory of emotions being conveyed through the body as animal spirits, and a literal use of animals as a metaphor to represent emotional, affect states.
Chapter three

‘-and the light it burns your skin, in a language you don’t understand’

There is an obvious visceral bodily quality to my work that links it to the idea of affect involving the body in a way of understanding that is separate from the mind. I have endeavoured to convey the sensations of the body the affective quality of our understanding of the world around us, which is informed by our relationship with ourselves. I aim in my work to evoke a feeling state I am experiencing and or the memory of a feeling state. It is direct and often there is an intuitive responsive way of working. My own work comes from a personal experiential place and also from an internal, deep place that defies easy interpretation.

I use animals as metaphors for the self and particularly the self in affective states. The use of metaphor in my work allows the communication of affect through known archetypal imagery. This relates to Carl Jung’s theories of the unconscious and of archetypes that relate to self and are universal/universally understood. This relates to Descartes theory of ‘animal spirits’ and is also related to Jung’s theories of archetypes and of the collective unconscious. The use of animal metaphors in my work allows for unconscious perception to come forward and by use of the symbolic, a by-passing of language. I am interested in how this can put us in touch with feeling states a heightened sense of bodily perception.

The works I will look at in this chapter are grouped into three categories that reflect the three aspects of affect I have elucidated in chapter one and two, being: affect as a sensation, affect as resonance and affect as an intensity or event. The first paintings I will explore relate to the idea of ‘affect as sensation’. In my work I deal with imagery that is suggestive of the body, 


particularly representations of feeling states, what Massumi calls a pre-cognitive knowledge that exists within the body. I have an approach where I start with no preconceived images and the work develops in an intuitive spontaneous and responsive way.

The second series of two paintings I will explore in relation to the idea of affect resonance. The figurative imagery in my work deals with depictions of the body and the human condition, with an emphasis on affect, emotional and psychological states. My work relates to Tomkins theory of ‘affective resonance’ through my exploration of capturing emotional expression and psychological states and conveying the ambiguity of affect that can exists between self and other.

The third theme of affect as event and intensity is characterized in my work through my use of imagery. The images have an intensity of affect that is autonomous and also capture moments in time, or seem to be fragments that suggest a greater narrative, often having a dream like quality to them.
I Affect as sensation

My work is characterized by an expression of feeling that relates to sensation and bodily awareness. I work from a proposition of these feeling states coming from an internal source and my work conveys a knowledge of affect as it is experienced through the body. In my work I have sought to convey the sensation of affect through using both figurative elements and also metaphors for the body. I convey a sensation bodily awareness through fluid, wash like effects of paint and use of line that is organic and gestural, suggestive of the ability of affect to ‘move’ through us. This relates to Massumi’s theories of affect as being a knowledge contained on and within the body and also as a state of flux, one that is dynamic and changing from one thing to another.

Figure 9. Shimmering, 2013, 56 x 72 cm, Watercolour and gouache on paper
An dome like structure seems to emerge from the dark that surrounds it, a complex interweave of lines form a grid which curves around its surface, alternately seeming to recede into the dark but also come forward into the light. There is a reflectivity of light as if from beyond the canvas. There is a visceral bodily like quality in the brushstrokes of colour that bleed into one another, suggestive of the systems that exist in the body and the communication of affect and sensation. The grid on the surface is not uniform and appears to be in a state of forming and un-forming. The use of colour further suggests the surface of skin as membrane to the outside world, the warmer and lighter colours of orange pink and white coming forward and the darker colours, blues, purples and blacks receding. I feel a sensation of tension in the image which is conveyed through contrasts; the suggestion of the biological/organic versus the artificial/manmade, the grid versus the curved dome, the warmth versus the dark, the suggestion of coming forward but also moving backwards. This relates to Massumi’s theory of the surface of the skin being a sensory receptor of affect and the permeability of the skin as a membrane and conduit for affect that both receives and transmits it. The dome also suggests a metaphor of figurative and references the body, which is conveyed by the curved shape of the object and also the use of a portrait orientation suggests figuration. I am reminded of the symbolic metaphor of the dome in sacred geometry, which has a strong sense of embodiment.

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69 Sacred geometry’s relationship mathematical representations of the body and it’s link to the spiritual, often used in the renaissance in architecture.

Robert Lawlor, Sacred Geometry: Philosophy & Practice (Art and Imagination) Thames & Hudson (June 17, 1982)
A dark figure dominates the canvas to my left. On the right, one perhaps two figures are fused together, their features completely burned out in a white light, small lines seem to escape outwards. The dark figure appears to be collapsing in on itself, and also bleeding outwards as if smoke is rising from it. The figure appears to raise and fold its arms covering its face in a protective gesture. The two figures on the right also conveys a sense of tension between external and internal forces. This is conveyed through the contrast of the crisp outline yet lack of internal features. I feel the sensation of being in the body and also outside of it. This suggests how feeling and affect being a force or movement which seems to exist both within and outside of the skin. The fluidity of the washes of colour also suggest the permeability of skin as a membrane between the body, and its ability to be affected through outside forces. This relates to
Massumi’s theory of affect\textsuperscript{70} as a state of becoming and state of flux, ever changing, a space of possibility and opening out. The title ‘Hold Release’ is suggestive of movement that is felt on the surface of the skin and also throughout the body. This affect takes place as a mysterious force that drives emotions/feelings and is beyond easy interpretation and translation as an externalization of internal states of intense tension. There is also a feeling of mystery through the lack of features to the enigmatic nature of sensation, the untranslatability of the bodily sensations/feelings into language\textsuperscript{71}. I feel from the figures colour bleeding and branching out into the background colour of a melding of the body/self with the elemental and natural, the body as mirror of outside universe, in flow of all things and not separate from mind, which relates to Spinoza’s seminal anti-Cartesian theory of self\textsuperscript{72} which describes a decentralization of knowledge within and on the body.


\textsuperscript{72} Benedictus De Spinoza, Trans. R.H.M.Elwes \textit{The Ethics, From The Project Gutenberg}, (In Public Domain, Champaign, Ill. : Project Gutenberg ; Boulder, Colo. : NetLibrary, 1999) p40
II Affect as resonance

In my work I use imagery of the body and faces. I have often tried to capture psychological states and affective states in my work. I try to capture/convey feeling states as my primary goal. This relates to Silvan Tompkins theory on one aspect of affect being ‘resonance’ the tendency of someone to experience the same affect and resonance in response to a display of affect/emotion by another person and as being the first/original basis of communication before words. Affect as experienced as an intensity that serves as motivation drive for feeling and action. Affect as having nine different parts that encompass key emotional states, Descartes’ animal spirits, metaphors of animals for affect.

Figure 10. The Other, 2013, 57 x 72 cm Watercolour and gouache on paper

A strange face, human but also animal like, looks out seemingly at me directly. This is a confrontational gaze. There is a strong non-verbal language that exists in this communication. The face through its bright colours of vermillion, blue and magenta suggests the non-human, the markings of a wild animal and also of the natural world. The face has an enigmatic quality through the combination of the recognizable human like features with the more animal and the inferred hair covering the face which obscures the expression. It has an affective quality that defies easy interpretation, I resonate with the expression on the face through a process of recognition, I empathize with the feelings conveyed by it, there is loneliness, a sadness and concern in its expression.

There is a blurring of edges that suggest that the figure is moving but there is also the stillness in the expression that conveys a caught in a moment of looking, possibly appearing out of its surrounds. The blurred background conveys movement. The bright green, yellow and blue colour further suggests a natural setting, possibly a surrounds of tropical vegetation. ‘The Other’ of the title is suggestive of our relationship with self and with another, what we can recognise as ourselves in another and with Tomkins theory of affect resonance as a movement between what we feel from looking into another’s expression. This relates with Silvan Tomkins theory of affect contagion as a sympathetic communication which is immediately registered and preverbal.

Figure 11. Anna Jarvis, *On A Wire*, 2013, Watercolour and gouache on paper,

A small figure appears to sit in the center of the image, is turns towards me, its black eye stares out to meet my gaze. It seems to challenges me, aware of itself being looked at. Its rounded soft form and lines suggests that it is a small bird. The blurring of form suggests movement. The small leg in contrast is fixed to the ground this is further emphasized by the sharp black banding that runs across its lower half, a wire or thread fixing it in place. The ground being a strong diagonal line moving from the right to the left upwards, brown blending into darker brown suggesting a tree branch or earth ground the figure rests on. There is movement conveyed in the sweeping gestural lines radiating outwards moving beyond the canvas. The bird is dwarfed by the surrounds. There is an abstraction of form, a suggestion rather than a detailed depiction that conveys rather the essence of a bird. The shallow distance and the close up view of the figure along with the title are suggestive of the bird being precariously balanced on the wire; I feel the affect conveyed in the image of the bird. I respond through a resonance of affect, I am empathising with the feelings conveyed by
the image of the bird. That it is tied down with its leg attached to a wire conveys a state of anxiety – it is trapped, and fear – it is vulnerable. The metaphor of a bird is suggestive of its qualities of flight, movement and fragility. The title also is suggestive of the state of affect in the work through its title of ‘on a wire’ which is the last three words of the phrase and also title song ‘bird on a wire’ by Leonard Cohen; ‘Like a bird on the wire…I have tried in my way to be free’, this song conveys a metaphor of being a bird in a state tension balancing itself on a wire, in a state of an apprehension and fear, of being tethered yet wanting to escape.

III Affect as event

“Affect, at its most Anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion”\textsuperscript{76}

In my work I use techniques that relate to imagery, framing, subject and narrative that convey the intensity and fluidity of affect. Within the idea of affect as event there is a intermingling of the elemental, nature and the body/self. Through my drawings and paintings I create scenes and images that are often dream-like and have elements of motion or suggested movement, this relates to Massumi’s theory of affect as a state of flux, of becoming, ever changing, a space of possibility and opening out\textsuperscript{77}. In my paintings there are metaphorical and archetypal images that evoke feeling states which are related to Massumi’s idea of affect as sensation, autonomous and having futurity. The overall quality that links many of the images in my work is one of intensity of affect that conveys what Greggs and Seigworth call a state ‘in-between-ness’\textsuperscript{78} in describing its essential nature.


\textsuperscript{77} Massumi, Brian, Parables For The Virtual : Movement, Affect, Sensation, (Durham, N.C. : Duke University Press 2002) 15

A tiger appears out of a swirling white mist, seeming to turn towards me with its mouth open and teeth bared. The tiger’s eyes stare out towards me, the tiger seeming to be captured in a moment of suddenly being aware of my presence and turning towards me. The treatment of the background is wash like in white, grey and blue and suggests a mist or fog-like atmosphere. The fluidity in brushstrokes and treatment of the tigers form also suggest this is a state of becoming, as if the tiger is forming before my eyes. It seems in a sudden moment, a tiger appears out of the mist, the imagery has a dreamlike quality. There is a mesmerizing, hypnotic quality.
to the tiger’s expression that conveys the feeling of an unknowable terror\textsuperscript{79}. The tiger’s gaze is transfixed and there is a strange beauty and magnificence to the tiger. Massumi calls the paradoxical nature of affect\textsuperscript{80}. I see the tiger as a metaphor for that which I fear. I have a heightened sense of the feeling to be aware of your own mortality when confronted with the possibility of death. The title of this work ‘…Burning Bright, in the forest of the night’ refers to a famous poem called ‘The Tyger’ by William Blake from work Songs Of Experience, 1794. The poem goes on the next lines ‘what immortal hand or eye, could frame thy fearful symmetry?... there is strong imagery in the title that is suggestive of an event taking place, the ‘Burning Bright... in the forest of the night’ suggests an allegory for fear and demons we face. Night traditionally being a time of the shadow side, the id\textsuperscript{81}, of dark and mysterious forces, the unconscious realms, nightmares, visions, the shadow side\textsuperscript{82}, ghosts, hauntings which we are confronted with\textsuperscript{83}. Goya’s etching ‘the sleep of reason produces monsters’ which was a critique of rationality, highlighting the powers of the unconscious.

\textsuperscript{79} Natural history, the phenomena of tigers markings, particularly on its face highlight its eyes and draw its prey towards them, then the tiger can hold the gaze of its prey as it comes forward to kill.


\textsuperscript{81} Sigmund Freud’s theory of the id.

\textsuperscript{82} Carl Jung’s theory of the unconscious shadow side, archetypes and dream theory.

\textsuperscript{83} Francisco Goya’s ‘The sleep of reason produces Monsters’ was a critique of rationality, highlighting power of the unconscious.
Figure 13. *La Cage Au Folle,* *(The cage of folly)*, 2012, Watercolour and ink on paper and gouache on paper, 2013, 56 x 76 cm

Four cages in total, the first two have canaries inside them, the last are empty. The two canaries are alone in their cages, they convey a feeling of entrapment, isolation and loneliness. I am reminded of the idea of ‘the canary in the mine’ which was the historical practice of placing a canary in a cage in a mine, the canaries would act as an warning signal to potential disaster, as they would be the first to react to the gas. This is a metaphor for impending danger, a
foreboding feeling, which relates to Massumi’s idea of affect as being an ‘intensity’ and also containing a ‘futurity’. The birds inside the cages and also the cages themselves are strong metaphors for self, sacrifice and entrapment. The portrait orientation of the canvases are a further suggestion of bodily dimensions and representations of self. The colours also highlights contrast, the left two cages conveys warmth yellow tone, red, brown, warm turquoise, whilst the right two cage conveys isolation through its palette of blue black green cool brown purple, the cages are surrounded by darkness. I empathize with the feeling of being trapped through identification with the canary and I am made aware of the sensation of it. The empty cages in progression from the canary cages suggest a narrative that the birds have escaped. Looking at the empty cages I am made aware through association of the metaphor for the loss of self and denial of freedom but also of escaping from them. The title ‘la cage aux folles’ translates as ‘the cage of folly’ which suggests the conflict between the rigid structure of entrapment versus the lack of meaning the structure embodies, and when understood for the falsity it is, the ability to free oneself from the trap.

Conclusion

This research paper has explored the concept of affect in art. Specifically this paper has examined affect and art in regards to historical theories on the origin of emotions and the development of current theories on emotions and affect and how they relate to art. I have explored in detail Massumi’s theory of affect as being located in the body, affect as being characterized by movement and being an event in nature and sensation and Tomkin’s theory of emotions and affect resonance. I have explored these theories in relation to art and have explored these ideas of affect in relation to the works of artists Maria Lassnig, Marlene Dumas and Mamma Andersson. I have examined how these artists have utilized approaches, methods, techniques, and imagery towards a personal language that convey affect in their work. I have then discussed in my own practice how I have developed a language that relates to the theories of affect I have explored in this paper and to the approaches and techniques of the three artists.

It can be seen in my work that I employ a number of approaches reflected in the work of Andersson, Dumas and Lassnig I have explored how we interpret affect and how we experience affect, emotions and feeling states. In my work I convey what is Massumi writes, beyond language, but known and informed through the bodily awareness. I work from a spontaneous intuitive approach to convey affect as sensation much like Lassnig’s body awareness, which aims to convey visually how affect operates as a force in the body.

My method of working also includes the use of found source material as a starting point or vehicle to generate affect. This can include found images, photographic sources and drawings. My reference points have sometimes been photographs and found images, like Dumas, who often also works from imagined imagery and drawings and then imbues them with feeling, and affect which relates to Tomkins theory of affect resonance. This is also conveyed in my work as I deal in depictions of the body and faces to convey the affective quality of feeling states.

My work like Anderssonn, takes found images as a starting point and then develops these into evocative dreamscapes. Like Andersson, in my work tries
to convey a sense of place/intensity /affect as event through use of imagery. The dream like quality to the work has similarities with Mamma Andersson’s paintings of imagined scenes and landscapes, images that are caught in a moment, through paint are frozen in time.

I use imagery of faces and bodies in my work like Marlene Dumas to convey affect which we the viewer empathise with we experience a translation of affect/we resonate with. Often these affective states encompass complex emotional combinations that are hard to put into words. This is part of the mystery/enigmatic quality that exists in her work.

Maria Lassnig works this way with her ‘body awareness’ approach, standing in front of a blank canvas with her sensations of body and emotion being the subject of her paintings. Also like Lassnig’s approach I utilize an intuitive responsive approach without prior planning, preconceived notions. Like lassnigs work I endeavor to convey the sensations of the body the affective quality of our understanding of the world around us, which is informed by our relationship with ourselves. Also like Lassnigs approach I utilize an intuitive responsive approach without prior planning, preconceived notions.

I create work from a basis of found sources images like Marlene Dumas, and Mamma Andersson, But rather than a depiction of said images i.e. a painting of a photograph; it is that these images provide the vehicle to express affect/emotional states.

The use of animals as metaphors and archetypes to convey affect in my work has similarities with Maria lassnig who also uses animal in her work together/in combination with figures of her own body. This is suggestive of a relationship of the animals embodying affective states and these affective states creating emotions in the body. Similarly Mamma Andersson also repeatedly uses images of animals, such as the bears in ‘kitchen fight’, to depict and convey the self, and this is in relation to affective states.

My practice is similar to that of Mamma Andersson, Marlene Dumas, and Maria Lassnig because the strength of these practices lies in the affective quality that pervades the work. The works all speak of that resides in and of the body and
of a communication of the sensation of affect. The exploration of affect through these theories and artists have enriched and deepened my understanding of my own work has been able to flourish as a result.
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