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## Emotional Conducts: A Phenomenological Account

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### ABSTRACT

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty, I contend that emotions should be regarded as emerging from our “vital communication” with the solicitations of our physical and social surroundings. My intention is to present emotions as unitary phenomena arising from an incessant flow of *motivations* that can be later articulated in terms of *reasons* (in cognitive theories of emotions) or in terms of *causes* (in affective neuroscience). I further suggest that emotions should be considered a specific kind of conducts, since the way in which a person acts out her emotions shapes their content, regulates their intensity and transforms the amorphous flow of felt motivations into a recognizable emotional stance for which she is held accountable. In conclusion, I put forward a series of arguments explaining why emotion tends toward its expression in conduct as if towards its completion.

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## Introduction

In his analysis of expressive emotional behaviour, Merleau-Ponty famously rejects the idea that emotions are inner, mental states whose reality can only be inferred from their overt, public displays. This rejection occurs in his discussion of our Being-for-others, where direct perception of another’s emotions allows Merleau-Ponty to criticize the basic presuppositions behind the problem of other minds. If we perceive someone’s anger directly in his clenched fists and threatening posture, his joy in his laughter, his sorrow in his tears and moaning, his disgust in the wrinkling of his nose, we are led to refute the idea that each mind is encapsulated in its own private sphere, and that we perceive others’ bodily gestures, postures and conducts firstly as mere physical movements which indicate the probable emotion behind them. In the phenomenological accounts of intersubjectivity, much attention has been devoted to the fact that our emotional interchange is based on our bodily capacity to be attuned to the expressive behaviours of other embodied others. What is still lacking, however, is an explicit acknowledgment that emotions are themselves shaped through our *expressive conducts*. My claim is that our conduct is constitutive of our emotional experiences insofar as it determines their content and intensity, make us accountable to others, and involves us

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in a joint sense-making of the given situation through our back-and-forth engagements with other interactants. My intention is to reappropriate Merleau-Ponty's claim about the intimate link between thought and speech in order to demonstrate that *emotion tends toward its expression in conduct as if towards its completion*.<sup>1</sup> If all thought tends towards its linguistic expression, it is because the significative intention is not accomplished without its formulation, which alone can secure and decide its validity. Therefore, expressing one's thoughts in language does not amount to translating an already clear and internally acquired meaning into an external medium. Rather, the thought is truly carried out only when expressed. I propose to apply the same idea to emotions: expressing one's emotions in one's conduct does not only consist in manifesting an already determined state with the only purpose of communicating it to others. In what follows, I intend to demonstrate that emotions acquire their identity and determination when expressed in a certain style of conduct.

### Emotions as Part of the Living Communication with the World

Since Merleau-Ponty has not developed a systematic theory of emotions, I will mainly draw on his analysis of perception as a methodological basis to present my own approach to affective phenomena. When Merleau-Ponty strives to overcome both the empiricist and the intellectualist accounts of perception, he introduces the notion of "sensing" understood as "living communication with the world".<sup>2</sup> Such a notion highlights the mutual exchange or reciprocity between our sensing body and its surroundings: the world presents itself to the perceiver as a proposal of meaning whose various degrees of indeterminacy the perceiver tends to resolve by her sensory-motor activity. Therefore, perceiving does not amount to the causal impingement of chemical and physical properties on our sensory apparatus; but neither can it be identified with an act of consciousness unilaterally assigning meanings to the world. Let us consider the experiment introduced by Merleau-Ponty in the final chapter of his *Phenomenology of Perception*:

... ..

Most of us will spontaneously perceive the figure above as six groupings composed of two dots each. Our act of perceiving them as such was surely *motivated* by the arrangement of those dots within our perceptual field. But the configuration by itself did not provide any *reason* for the perceptual meaning that emerged from it. Neither did it *cause* such meaning to appear. The lesson to be drawn from this example is the following. The world does not *cause* our perception, but we do not *impose* our ideas and reasons to what we perceive either. Rather, the features of the perceptual field *motivate* our act of perceiving them as meaningful. Even though the configuration of dots is indeterminate or ambivalent, it motivates my perceptual attitude towards it, which has to resolve some tension between its elements and stabilize the overall perceptual situation into some coherent meaning.

What Merleau-Ponty says about perception applies *mutatis mutandis* to emotions if we understand them as conducts through which we spontaneously reply to relevant changes in our surroundings. To account for them phenomenologically, we can see

<sup>1</sup> Cf. "Thought tends toward expression as if toward its completion." Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 182.

<sup>2</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 53.

how such conducts are brought about, i. e. motivated, by some salient, surprising, threatening or offending features within our surroundings. At the same time, the agent determines the nature and strength of the motive by engaging in one of the available coping strategies. For instance, the significance of the threat as the motive of my fear depends in retrospect on whether I opt for a courageous defence rather than a retreat strategy.<sup>3</sup>

The phenomenological account aims to provide an adequate description of the way in which the subject of emotions experiences their meaning *in statu nascendi*: as motivated by some practically significant changes around her to which she has to reply or at least adopt an appropriate attitude. But we can also take a step back from the way emotions are experienced in order to provide an answer to two types of “why-questions”. Either we require justification of what we feel and do in terms of reasons, or we ask for a causal explanation in terms of the necessary and sufficient conditions that prompted our emotional behaviours. In the first case, we have to adopt an intellectual attitude towards our conduct, in order to be able to justify our way of acting by grounding it on our reasons and by making explicit our appraisal of the relevant aspects of the situation. Such an attitude is further developed in cognitive theories that seek to explore the logic of the various evaluations that underlie our emotional life. If we take a naturalistic approach to it, we can say that our body is subject to the determined effects of external stimuli, further transmitted to our nervous and endocrine system, which organizes a specific response to such an event. The most powerful development of this attitude is represented by contemporary affective neuroscience interested in determining the causal “underpinning of emotional life”.<sup>4</sup> Only because we have such possibility to switch between these positions when confronted with the question “why?” does there seem to be a gap between seemingly competing accounts of emotions in terms of neurochemical processes, or in terms of appraisals and evaluations. My present attempt aims to dispel the seemingly puzzling tension between these two accounts by showing that they both operate in spaces abstracted from our bodily coping with the world: respectively the *space of causes* and the *space of reasons*.

Since the turn of the century, there have been many attempts to overcome the longstanding opposition between cognitive theories, that emphasized the appraisal of the situation for our well-being as the core-component of emotions, and the somatic theories, that explained emotions in terms of autonomous physiological responses to significant features or events in our surroundings. Even the most ardent proponents of appraisal theories, such as Solomon, have ultimately acknowledged that bodily arousal is an integral part of emotional experience,<sup>5</sup> while philosophers closer to neuroaffective science, such as Prinz, proposed to associate our sensations of bodily change with their intentional direction in terms of “embodied appraisals”.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the dispute about which component is essential or primary and which is merely derived or secondary has been significantly watered down and most contemporary theories acknowledge that

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<sup>3</sup> My point, however, is not that emotional experiences are analogous to perceptual experiences in every respect. Emotions differ from perceptions not only because they are essentially *felt*, but also because the feeling subject is concerned by the situation at hand to such a degree of self-involvement that the perception cannot reach (unless it is emotionally charged). I explain this difference in greater detail when I present my objections to perceptual theories of emotion, such as Tappolet's.

<sup>4</sup> See LeDoux.

<sup>5</sup> Solomon, “Emotions, Thoughts, and Feelings”, 85.

<sup>6</sup> Prinz, *Gut Reactions*, 52–78.

emotions typically include all of the following components: cognitive appraisals, inner feelings relative to bodily arousals, motor reactions coupled with action tendencies and involuntary expressions. However, it is not enough to merely acknowledge and enumerate various dimensions of our affective life, but rather to explain how all these supposed constituents of an emotion are connected to each other. From now on, the main problem to be solved is to provide a full account of emotion that is not a mere juxtaposition or sequence of elements.

A phenomenological account of emotions meets such a requirement by understanding emotions as wholes where each part contributes to the overall meaning of emotional experience. Emotions should be understood first as unitary phenomena that can be only *ex post* decomposed into what seem to be – once we adopt an objectivizing perspective – their components. Against the strong impulse to decompose emotion from the start into such clearly demarcated elements, my account of emotions in terms of conducts provides the means to grasp our affective experiences as simultaneously unified, albeit internally structured phenomena. Since conducts are necessarily intentional and bodily, motivated by inner feelings and oriented towards some practically significant state of affairs, cutting across the divide between psychological interiority and physical exteriority, such an approach allows us to avoid the dispute over whether emotions are primarily cognitive appraisals of the current situation, or bodily reactions to changes in one's environment. Prior to defending my main claim about how all of the aforementioned dimensions of emotional life find their synthesis in the notion of emotional conducts, let me first review Jesse Prinz's theory of "embodied appraisals", as it represents one of the most significant and influential attempts to overcome the antagonism between cognitive and somatic theories, based on extensive empirical studies and naturalistic assumptions. Furthermore, Prinz's goal is parallel to my own ambition to highlight and to make more comprehensible the interplay of evaluative, bodily and expressive dimensions of emotions, by bringing them together into a unified account. My critical assessment of Prinz will ultimately allow me to better delineate the main differences between phenomenological and naturalistic approach to emotional phenomena.

## Embodied Appraisals

The first thing to note is that bodily feelings should not be conflated with registrations of physiological changes occurring within our organism. We do not necessarily feel our body and most of its stimuli are below the threshold of our consciousness, but it is necessarily through our body that we experience our situation. Along these broad lines, the phenomenological account of emotions is in agreement with the naturalistic account provided by Prinz. The author of *Gut Reactions* is certainly right in asserting against Damasio that emotional feelings do not have the body as their primary intentional object.<sup>7</sup> On Prinz's account, even though emotions are felt within our bodies, viscera, lungs, heart and other members included, they are directed towards existentially

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<sup>7</sup> For Damasio, emotions are primarily ways of perceiving changes in the organs affected by (and responding to) what we encounter in the world. Prinz rightly calls such a claim "a strange hypothesis" (*Gut Reactions* 57), since we are obviously not proud about our bodily arousals, but about our achievements, we are sad about our loss, and not about our lachrymal glands.

significant objects and events, such as threats to one's survival. While each of these feelings registers some physiological change taking place in our organism, they nevertheless represent relational properties of the world affecting our personal well-being. I find equally praiseworthy Prinz's contention that emotions do not appraise the events affecting our concerns and interests by incorporating propositional attitudes. As demonstrated by empirical evidence, no higher cognitive states are required in order to evaluate significant changes in the environment, such as snake-like figure under one's feet, since these are detected on the level of thalamus and amygdala, which initiate fear response independently of any involvement of cortex.<sup>8</sup>

However, there are several shortcomings within such a view. First of all, intentionality of emotions is denigrated to a mere apparatus that was set up by our evolutionary history to detect environmental changes.

A perception of a patterned bodily response can represent danger in virtue of the fact that it has the function of serving as a danger detector. In other words, emotions are like smoke alarms. A tone in a smoke alarm represents fire because it is set up to be set off by fire. And perceptions of patterned changes in our body represent danger (and loss, and offense, etc.), because they are *set up to be set off by* danger (and loss, and offense, etc.).<sup>9</sup>

To be sure, many artificial apparatus, such as smoke detectors or thermostats, have been set up by humans to respond differentially to registered inputs, so that they might represent, through their inner wirings, some features and changes of the world, such as smoke particles in the air or temperature variations.<sup>10</sup> However, unlike thermostats, we are sensitive to meanings because we are essentially non-indifferent to what is going on and how do we fare in our dealings with the world and others. As sentient beings, we respond differentially to the meanings of perceived changes in our environment because we care about our being: we are concerned not just with survival, but rather with the *way we find ourselves in the world* and *the way we project ourselves into the future*. Therefore, we do not merely register the significant aspects of our world, but are preoccupied with them, focusing on their significance as something to be actively dealt with.

Secondly, Prinz's view assumes that our relation to the world is mostly the relation of causality, followed by a relation of representation. In the passage quoted above, emotional values like "danger" or "offence" are represented by our capacity to register bodily changes that are caused by triggers relative to dangerous and offensive situations. Emotion would thus represent the class of objects which "it is set up to be set off by". However, strictly causal relationships hold between objects and events, but not between meanings. There is no significance involved in the causal way one billiard ball transfers its kinetic force to another. The problem here lies in the identification of the body with an object among other three-dimensional objects of physical reality and in the identification of feelings with patterns of sensations. Once we reduce our sensing body, that is constantly geared to the world and affectively related to it, to a piece of

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<sup>8</sup> LeDoux 158; Prinz, *Gut Reactions*, 34.

<sup>9</sup> Prinz, "Which Emotions Are Basic?", 82.

<sup>10</sup> However, we should not forget that thermometers only detect temperature because humans, as embodied beings who are interested in weather conditions, have commissioned and enabled their mechanism to provide reliable reports on a particular state of affairs. Contrary to what Descartes claims, it is not the composition of the mechanism that can explain the functioning of an organism, but rather the opposite.

matter causally subject to other pieces of matter, it becomes unclear how bodily sensations might “inform” us about the situation we are in. By identifying bodily feelings with a purely objective causal processes, Prinz deprives our bodies from their capacity to engage in a meaningful exchange with the world.

Finally, in Prinz’s conception, dangers, losses, and other significant features of the situation exist independently of our actions: they are merely represented. The loss of my favourite turtle is not “response-dependent”<sup>11</sup> because loss is simply a loss that I can do nothing about. While it is easy to accept that the death of my turtle is an event independent of my reaction, does it imply that such an event is already and by itself determined as a loss? Prinz here falls victim to what Merleau-Ponty calls the fallacy of “objective thinking”, i.e. the assumption that the world consists of determinate entities that stand in external relations to one another, our body being only one of such entities. The phenomenological perspective, on the contrary, allows us to acknowledge how the meaning of the events are brought for by the way we deal with them. Let us now turn to Merleau-Ponty’s conception of motivation to see whether it helps overcome the above-mentioned shortcomings of Prinz’s objectivist account.

### Emotions Within the Space of Motivations

From a phenomenological perspective, the world makes me move not in an externally determined way, but in a way that I can carry further and beyond its initial impulse. Moreover, what I do about a motivating event retrospectively validates that event as the true motive for my conduct.

The motive is an antecedent that only acts through its sense, and it must even be added that it is the decision that confirms this sense as valid and that gives it its force and its efficacy.<sup>12</sup>

The first part of the quote suggests that the motivating force of some significant change is a function of its perceived meaning. The second part points to the retrospective validation of the motive (and its actual strength) by the very performance of the motivated act. The significance of a particular loss should not be therefore considered as independent of the effort and difficulty of coping with it. Coincidentally, Merleau-Ponty also chooses the example of a loss – not of a turtle but of a close friend – to describe the relationship between a motivating event and my behaviour motivated by it. How does my friend’s death motivates my journey to his funeral? It is precisely as perceived solicitation to pay my respects and honour our friendship that such a death summons me to embark on a journey. And my undertaking such a journey gives the summons a more central place in my life: “By deciding to undertake this journey, I validate this motive that is proposed and I take up this situation.”<sup>13</sup> A loss remains in a fundamental *indeterminacy* prior of reorganizing one’s experiential world in the face of it.<sup>14</sup> The various mourning rituals are designed to help the bereaved cope with the experience of

<sup>11</sup> The death of my pet turtle “would be a loss even if I didn’t represent it as a loss. It is a loss before I make the discovery that my turtle is dead”. Prinz, *Gut Reactions*, 63.

<sup>12</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 270.

<sup>13</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 270.

<sup>14</sup> For an illuminating description of the distinctive experience of indeterminacy following the death of a close loved one, see Ratcliffe.

indeterminacy that is central to grief. In particular, by concretizing and transforming this indeterminacy into a tangible and manageable reality, such as a funeral, mourning rituals are supposed to re-establish, at least partially, the broken continuity between the world as it has been and as it continues to be.

Merleau-Ponty explores the way in which a motivating event is related to the motivated act in two contexts: (i) the practical context of action, where the motive remains indeterminate until it is confirmed as valid by one's decision and (ii) in the context of perception, where the perceiver is first presented with potentially ambivalent phenomena that gradually crystallize and take the form of determinate things (one has to explore them or at least adopt the right attitude and distance in order to let them reveal their true colours and characters). In both cases, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the transition from a still undetermined impulse or summons to a determination of its meaning through our action or attitude. My proposal is to apply Merleau-Ponty's ideas on motivation to the domain of affective phenomena. Firstly, this should allow us to recognize that significant changes in the environment do not *cause* our emotions in a mechanistic sense, nor should they be considered, in an over-intellectualized sense, as *reasons* for experiencing this or that emotion. Second, such a proposal should provide a means of unpacking the various meanings entangled in our "because-statements" that are part of our most common formulations about the origins of our emotions (I am wallowing in sadness because someone close to me has died; I am angry with a colleague because of his insulting attitude). Finally, accounting for the emergence of emotions out of their motives provides the premises for my central claim, according to which the ambivalent mix of often conflicting motives and feelings finds its determinate resolution and circumscribed meaning through one's emotional conduct.

As we have seen above, the motivated behaviour is brought about by the motive, but the motive retrospectively acquires its motivating force from what it motivates. While the causal relations are merely external, "the relation between the motivating and the motivated is [...] reciprocal".<sup>15</sup> This means that the motive and what it motivates are *internally related*. Your offensive remark and my anger are strictly correlated in the sense that one cannot be what it is without the other. Someone like Prinz might object, that the initial remark would exist even if nobody would get angry about it. But the logical interdependence here is not a matter of existence, but rather of meaning: my anger reveals the offensive character of your speech act; and your speech act is precisely what gives my anger its specific content.

Explaining our emotions as emerging from the sphere of motivation further prevents us from regarding experiences as a mere succession of clearly demarcated mental states, causally linked to each other or somehow "produced" by their physiological counterparts. As part of "the flow of motivations that carry me into [the world]",<sup>16</sup> even the simplest affect, feeling or emotion is a temporally extended and internally structured whole that entails the retention of my past experiences and the anticipation of what is likely to happen. Within the context of his discussion of genuine and illusionary feelings, Merleau-Ponty insists on the temporal dimension of affective life, the outcomes of which retrospectively allow the person herself to better understand the character

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<sup>15</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 270.

<sup>16</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 309.



of her previous emotional experiences and episodes. “A collection of indefinite motives”<sup>17</sup> crystallizes progressively into a sharper awareness of what I truly feel through my active engagement with the world. Only time will tell whether my summer infatuation with a beautiful stranger was a mere fling with no other consequences than a fleeting regret for our early, albeit predictable separation, or the real motive behind a long-standing engagement that had turned my existence upside down. Once again, the meaning of the motivating events is retrospectively dependent upon the motivated conduct.

From the phenomenological standpoint, the causal interaction between the human body and significant changes in its environment, which is the focus of Prinz’s theory, is based on an abstract idealization of the sphere of motivation. The things and people surrounding us do not cause our emotions to emerge in the same way that one billiard ball sets another in motion. We are not emotionally solicited by the physical properties of things, but rather by their perceived and expressive qualities. My emotions do not answer to photons reflected on the retina, but to some meaningful, emotionally charged configuration. Of course, if we want to understand in detail the neurological underpinnings of our emotions, it is useful and enlightening to measure the heart rate, the flow of serotonin, endorphin, oxytocin etc. However, the body has its felt dimension, which cannot be exhaustively laid out in objective terms: my own body is experienced as an undivided kinaesthetic unity, it is the zero point of my orientation within the world in which I dwell, and it makes sense of the matters at hand according to its own abilities to cope with them. In contrast with the neuroscientific perspective, the phenomenological body is not an occurrent piece of matter; it can be only *in abstracto* considered in terms of merely quantitative and objective data. In Husserl’s *Ideas II*, motives differ from physical causes in that they do not need to exist “objectively” in order to act upon us and to set our body in motion. For instance, Othello’s fantasies about Desdemona’s infidelity are motives of his jealousy. Furthermore, motivational sequences do not have the form of physical laws, since there is no deterministic link between a motive and the action or thought it motivates, and since they are not repeatable and universally valid in the same way as natural laws. “Le motif incline sans nécessiter”,<sup>18</sup> as Leibniz puts it. Finally, motives cannot be reduced to causes, because unlike causes they move us within *normative constraints*. Such constraints profoundly transform the motivational force of our most vital drives and urges. For instance, the perception of an appetizing meal does not provoke my desire to grab it and satisfy my hunger if rules of conduct disqualify such a conduct as inappropriate in the given context. The field of motivations is thus populated by vital drives and personal concerns mixed with social pressures, by external solicitations assorted with our own self-projections into the future, as well as by dispositions inculcated in our bodies in the form of habits.

Obviously, motivations come in many forms, shadings, nuances and even inconsistencies: they rarely form a coherent totality that would determine my conduct in a unilateral manner. And that is why the predominantly involuntary character of our motivations in no way implies that our actions should follow from them in the way that a set of physical

<sup>17</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 309.

<sup>18</sup> Leibniz 390. See also Ricoeur’s analysis of affective tendencies inclining our acting (*Freedom and Nature*, 71) and Jakub Čapek’s insightful summary of the essential bond between motive and action in “Motivation et normativité”.

causes inevitably produces a single effect. Inner contradictions and the confusing variety of all such felt solicitations are the reason why the person herself has to appraise their respective weight and to overcome frequent cases of evaluative dissonance. Only my active endorsing of one of the possible directions outlined by my corporeal excitations and stirrings can resolve their tensions, ambiguities and indeterminacies. Even in cases where I am subject to an almost immediate affective outburst, whether I follow the trajectory traced out by the initial, instinctive impulse or resist it, divert it or sweep it under the carpet still depends on me.

At the same time, the motives behind our emotional conducts should not be conflated with a set of reasons. In this regard, it is instructive that Merleau-Ponty criticizes not only the presupposed autonomy of the “physicalist” account of the human body, but also Husserl’s “personalistic attitude”, from which the motives behind our thoughts, perceptions and feelings are almost identified with reasons. As Taylor Carman rightly observed, “[in Husserl,] the link between motivating and motivated attitudes takes the form of a hypothetical (‘if-then’) judgment”.<sup>19</sup> It is precisely this intellectualist assumption behind Husserl’s theory of motivation that Merleau-Ponty rejects when he suggests that reasons do not exhaust the intricate fabric of motivations to act.

When we translate the “flow of motivations” in terms of reasons, i.e. when we strive to grasp the logical structure behind our pre-reflective tendencies to act, we inevitably reduce the highly complex mesh of miscellaneous motivating features to an abstract scheme of our acting. The ambivalence of our vital communication with the world is simplified when I stand back from it in order to translate my being-moved into a set of beliefs, desires and explicit reasons. When I do this, “when I want to express myself, I crystallize a collection of indefinite motives in an act of consciousness”.<sup>20</sup> Grasping one’s implicit motivations consciously, i.e. translating felt solicitations to move one’s body into an explicit reason to act, amounts to giving a schematizing and restricted representation of their experienced flow. In Mark Wrathall’s words, any attempt to justify one’s motivated experiences on the basis of reasons “ends up focusing on some narrow subset of a rich and complex set of motives”.<sup>21</sup> In this sense, motives are not entirely reducible to reasons, nor to evaluative judgments about the emotionally charged situations.

We can thus say that the grounds of human affectivity have to be delineated first within this space of motivation, where my feeling body is responsive to the situational demands and changes as to the social constraints, according to my more or less effective capacity to cope with them. Only *ex post* is it possible to formulate all these motivations within the space of reasons where it makes sense to distinguish between different propositional attitudes, such as beliefs, judgments, desires or discrete feelings (taken as a special class of mental phenomena). At the same time, the sphere of motivation also constitutes the overlooked ground for all investigation into the causal interaction between the body and its surroundings, since purely physical body-world interactions – if taken as mechanical processes – would remain devoid of any meaning unless they are integrated into an affective and practical orientation of a person within

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<sup>19</sup> Carman 213.

<sup>20</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 309.

<sup>21</sup> Wrathall 119.

her situation. In the end, the explanatory gap, supposedly open between cognitive and physiological accounts of emotional experience, is not something to be bridged, but something to be explained in its genesis from our primary involvement in the sphere of motivations, where we engage with what concretely matters. Emotions cannot be fully accounted for if we treat them as mere occurrences among other causal processes in the world, nor if we consider them as belonging to the internal life of the mind, directly accessible only to its owner. From the phenomenological perspective, they are neither private mental states nor hard-wired reactions occurring in viscera and brain, but they manifest themselves in the form of conduct motivated by perceived solicitations of one's environment.

## Emotional Conducts

Merleau-Ponty's metaphor of "vital communication" between the self and the world further points to the inextricability of activity and receptivity in our affective engagements with the world. The best concept available to grasp this mutual dependence between "moving oneself" and "being moved" is that of *emotional conducts*.<sup>22</sup> It allows the recognition that the passive-receptive dimension of affectivity goes hand in hand with our active engagement with the world: we are constantly affected by various tugs and pulls, but not without guiding ourselves, i.e. not without the continuous monitoring, assessing and reorienting of our grip on the situation. The notion of conduct refers precisely to all such fine-grained everyday coping that is not determined by conscious intentions or deliberate choices, but rather relies on bodily ability to appropriately reply to the relevant solicitations of our physical and social Umwelt. The notion of conduct also points to our capacity to incorporate habits into our sensorimotor and affective transactions with social and natural surroundings. These acquired habits bypass the need to act on the basis of conscious deliberation, since they allow the individual to rely to social scripts whose typical unfolding was learnt in past experiences. Emotional conducts are thus guided by a "practical logic"<sup>23</sup> rather than by the computational processing of representations, followed by the formulation of the conscious goals to be achieved. Furthermore, the term of conduct seems more appropriate than the one of action, since it allows the inclusion of a much wider variety of more or less spontaneous behaviours, gestures and expressions, including those that are more than often experienced as difficult to control. And yet, such difficulty in no way absolves emotional agents of public accountability for their posture and conduct, as opposed to simple reflexes. Emotional conducts thus fall somewhere between clear-cut cases of consciously orchestrated action and merely automatic responses to emotional triggers, such as startle reaction.

Redefining emotions in terms of conduct does not imply that emotions are nothing more than behaviour, nor that we should subscribe to a behaviourist theory. As should be clear by now, the meaning of conduct is not exhausted in what behaviourists

<sup>22</sup> The possibility of redefining emotions in terms of *conduct* is suggested, but not developed in Merleau-Ponty's refusal to identify emotions with private mental states: "Anger, shame, hate and love are not psychic facts hidden at the bottom of another's consciousness: they are types of behaviour or *styles of conduct* which are visible from the outside. They exist on this face or in those gestures, not hidden behind them" (Merleau-Ponty, "The Film and the New Psychology", 52–53, emphasis mine).

<sup>23</sup> In the sense defined by Pierre Bourdieu as a "system of schemes capable of orienting practice without entering consciousness except in an intermittent and partial way" (269–70).

analyse in terms of quantifiable muscular movements or response to a stimulus. In contrast to a purely physicalist conception of behaviour, I emphasize with Merleau-Ponty that bodily conduct is imbued with intentionality and intelligence, even though it is not guided by a purely intellectual consciousness. By presenting emotions as conducts, I intend to show that emotions not only lead to certain actions or patterns of behaviour as their by-product, but that various expressive conducts are constitutive of our emotions. From this perspective, slamming the door is as determinative of my rage as hiding is of my fear. In what follows, I will present several arguments that serve as stepping stones to overcome the widely held prejudice that the actual form of an emotion is decided somewhere deep within us, while the emotional gesture, action, or posture comes after the fact, as a mere supplement. This conception is biased in that it artificially separates the emotion itself, with its presumably inner reality, from its outer manifestation, whereby our surroundings are subsequently informed of this reality. In the second part of this paper, I will argue against this prejudice, mainly by showing that emotions acquire their identity and determinacy through our conduct, which thus cannot be a mere consequence of emotions but their constitutive dimension.

Seeing emotions as conducts presents several theoretical advantages. First, it allows us to review the ontological basis of “appraisal theories” and opens up the possibility of providing a less intellectualist account of appraisal. In most cognitive approaches, the intentionality of emotions is due to the fact that they are evaluative representations. This results in a prejudicial separation of the emotion in a mental component, to which it is necessary to add a bodily component of arousal. On my account, the *appraisal* that these theories consider an essential component of any emotion is to be redefined in terms of a *felt bodily stance* that relates to our personal way of coping with some practically significant state of affairs. Therefore, it is not a matter of representing or judging our surroundings, but rather of certain positioning vis-à-vis the constellation that we cannot fully oversee, since we are immersed in it. Above all, we cannot fully grasp by our cognitive abilities all the issues at stake, since emotionally charged situations are precisely those whose outcome is the most uncertain: we have to rely on the wisdom of our body which makes us feel the urgency of dealing with certain pressing matters and at the same time indicates specific ways to meet them.

In this respect, my explanation betrays certain similarities with the attitudinal theory proposed by Julien Deonna and Fabrice Teroni, according to which emotions involve the awareness of one’s body adopting a specific stance towards an object.<sup>24</sup> Deonna and Teroni succeeded quite convincingly to bring together intentional and evaluative dimensions of emotions by grounding both of them in the holistic relation of one’s body towards the situation and on the perceivable tendency to act in a certain way. My account endorses the centrality of felt bodily attitudes and takes it two steps further. First, while such bodily attitudes or postures are certainly essential and constitutive of the character of the emotions, their variations within our conduct is precisely what provides the dynamics of emotional life. In other words, while Deonna and Teroni provide a description about how an attitude constitutes a given emotion in a particular instant, it seems to me crucial to explain as well how these attitudes evolve diachronically. Such a

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<sup>24</sup> Deonna and Teroni 79.

step might help Deonna and Teroni's to address some of the objections raised against their attitudinal approach. According to some critics, passive emotions such as sadness do not involve any action-readiness.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the attitude proper to sadness cannot be identified with the body's being poised to act, but rather with the experience of one's body as being prevented from acting. In my view, such cases clearly deserve to be characterized in terms of passive conducts, because they present a variation or transformation of previous ways in which we relate to the world and to others. Passive sadness involves, for example, ignoring requests or refusing to participate in cordial exchanges. A child's passive anger may consist of sulking and avoiding contact. Both are conducts insofar as they are *variations of the usual ways of being-with-others*. A second important step beyond Deonna and Teroni's account is to emphasize the impact of the conduct on the situation at hand: a child's sulking can potentially reconfigure the situation based on the parents' reaction. In the case of passive sadness, another kind of impact on the individual's overall situation can be observed: as a conduct, my passive sadness brings forth further motives to be sad. Since it results in my missing out on many opportunities for pleasurable activities, such conduct in sadness has a kind of self-fulfilling character. My feeling that there is "no joy in this world" is mutually dependent on my passive conduct expressed by the sigh of "why even bother trying?" In both cases there is a constant exchange between my emotional conduct and the type of situation my conduct puts me in. As the situation unfolds, so do my felt evaluations of it, always subject to further revision. It is therefore necessary to treat the evaluative and agentive "components" of our emotional life conjointly.

That is also why our emotions do not consist merely of *perceiving* values, as suggested by Döring or Tappolet,<sup>26</sup> but rather in *attending* to affective affordances practically. When acting emotionally, I am a directly concerned party, readily and actively engaged with the matter at hand, not a spectator which can distance herself from what she perceives. Something I care about prompts me to provide an appropriate emotional response, and it is only insofar as I unfold my emotional reply within a specific conduct that I bestow a determinate significance and weight upon the affective qualities of a given situation. This leads to another reason to differentiate perceptual from emotional experience: unlike in perception, my *self* is readily and intimately involved in my emotional conduct, in which I disclose not only what is at stake in the given situation, but also my own personal cares and concerns.<sup>27</sup>

Different types and degrees of self-involvement determine the type and intensity of emotions, even in cases where the participants share the same situation and are directed toward the same object to be evaluated. For instance, the composer, orchestra members, conductor, and audience may all hope that the first performance of a symphony will be successful and may even share a common joy following the final note, potentially reinforced by the fusion of elated feelings among all present. However, because the various participants in the event differ radically in their concerns, commitments, and levels of personal involvement, their respective emotions will be noticeably dissimilar. The composer puts her self-esteem and reputation on the line, while the audience

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<sup>25</sup> Pelser 241.

<sup>26</sup> Döring; Tappolet, *Emotions et Valeurs*.

<sup>27</sup> See Slaby 280 and 286.

does not; her joy will eventually be mixed with pride. The composer's emotion will also be more individualistic than that of the musicians who have collectively committed themselves to an excellent performance, while the audience has not committed itself to much more than attentive listening. What one does and how one is committed affects the degree and nature of the emotion felt. Perceiving the beauty, harmony and success of the performance does not necessarily result in the same emotion.

My hypothesis is that Tappolet minimizes the importance of self-involvement in emotional experience because she construes it too narrowly and equates it with self-interestedness, i. e., with the exclusive concern about my personal well-being. This allows her to state that one can get angry even when one perceives an offense (an unjust accusation in her example) made to another.<sup>28</sup> Hence, I can perceive and evaluate the situation as offensive even though my well-being is not concerned by such an offense. Such an account, however, misconstrues the nature of our self-involvement. There is a plethora of multifarious concerns for which we deem it worthy to get involved: we care not only about our survival and well-being, but also about justice, social recognition or maintaining sincere relationships, about our sense of belonging to a community or about potential conflicts between social expectations and our capacity to meet them. Given the potentially massive disagreement about what really matters for a life worth living, it is critical to consider how we manifest our overall existential commitments in our emotional conducts, while being held accountable for them. All these dimensions of emotions are neglected when we construe them as analogous to perceptions rather than treating them in terms of conduct.

Furthermore, understanding emotions as conducts provides a way to preserve the unity of emotional phenomena and to account for the integration of its various dimensions. It is precisely our conduct that organizes the inner experience and secures the unity of temporally extended emotional flow. To date, most theories regard emotion as existing in principle prior to and independently of emotional conduct, which is conceived as something arising *out of* already given and determinate emotion. While it is true that many contemporary approaches recognize “action readiness”, “motivation to act”, or another motor component as part of emotional experience, they nevertheless operate a dichotomy between the emotion itself and the “action out of emotion”, as if the latter was the end-product of the former.<sup>29</sup> Even authors who are ready to admit an “intimate link” between emotion and action insist that such a link is easy to break, since the same emotion can give rise to different types of behaviour. The relationship between emotion and action would then be rather “weak”, as Frijda suggests: “[t]he link between emotion and action is intimate; yet it is weak. Anger has intimate links to aggression, but few angers actually go that far”.<sup>30</sup> On such account, anger would be what it is inside of me, even though it translates into different types of conduct. However, it is easy to see that anger expressed in merely grumpy conduct is different from the anger expressed overtly by yelling, verbally threatening or physically intimidating. In passive-aggressive anger, we ingeniously find multiple silent ways to retaliate and protest against what we feel is unfair conduct on the part of our significant other, without actually wanting to

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<sup>28</sup> Tappolet, *Emotions, Values, and Agency*, 73.

<sup>29</sup> See Goldie 37–47. The most significant attempt to unify the emotional phenomena from an action-oriented perspective was provided by Slaby and Wüschner in their excellent paper “Emotions and Agency”.

<sup>30</sup> Frijda 163.

break the relationship. By sabotaging and deceiving others' efforts to reconnect, we give back to our partners much of what we feel they have done to us. The (rather foolish) hope is that they will realize this and learn to treat us better. My point is that this passive-aggressive anger is in itself different from openly expressed anger. What I reveal in it – albeit unconsciously or unreflectively – is my desire to maintain the relationship that I cannot afford or do not want to compromise. In open anger, I risk it all: I would rather break up than continue to have such a humiliating and degrading relationship with you. Therefore, the link between emotion and conduct is not weak, but essential for the nature of emotional experience. On my view, emotional conducts are not simply final outputs succeeding already full-blown emotional states, for they constitute the direction of emotions, regulate their rhythm and intensity, disambiguate their very content, and hold us accountable to societal norms. This claim is to be substantiated in the following part of my paper, where I discuss the most significant reasons why emotions cannot exist independently of their behavioural manifestations, and why they should not be severed from their expression in action in empirical studies.

### The Intimate Link Between Conducts and Emotions

(1) Firstly, only when our feelings are *acted out* within a specific interaction can we be sure that the affect results in the entire involvement of the person, and that it does not fade away as a fleeting sensation of little consequences. Unlike sensations or pangs, emotions must endure, and only time will show their true worth. For instance, a mere startled reaction (as well as other reflex mechanisms described by affective neurosciences) does not count as the emotion of fear that becomes fully-fledged only while we flee, hide or remain in a frozen posture. Attending to one of these possibilities will undoubtedly affect the specific way in which I experience my fear and perceive the threat. For instance, it is within our ability to “own” our fear through courageous conduct. We are, of course, still afraid, but we shape this feeling in accordance with our ability to cope appropriately with the difficulty at hand. We can also allow ourselves to sink into our fear, while adopting a hiding strategy. Here again, we disclose what we value the most by endorsing such a conduct, which is guided by our pursuit of staying safe. Whether we commit to the former option or the latter, in both cases we transform the initial affect by attending to one of the available forms of self-conduct. From the perspective of existentially oriented phenomenology, our very being-in-the-world, understood as transcendence, consists of the act of “taking up” and transforming the “*de facto* situation” into an (inter)-personal matter of concern.<sup>31</sup> My way of bearing myself in a frightening situation manifests both the precise nature of my emotion and what I implicitly take as worth pursuing.

(2) Apart from specifying its content, acting out one's emotion also *regulates* its intensity and *adjusts* its rhythm. Regarding the variation of intensity, it can be clearly evidenced in our ability to suffer, suppress, endure or enjoy the affect by channelling it into a particular behaviour; the vivacity of our gesture or conduct increases the intensity of the felt affect. In defending her case of being wronged and demanding justice, a person might start her speech with calm and determination, but the more vividly she talks, the

<sup>31</sup> Existence “does not admit any pure facts in themselves, because it is the movement by which facts are taken up”. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 173.

stronger her indignation and emotional excitement become. The flow of emotion is also paced by the rhythm of its expression in gestures and conduct, as Merleau-Ponty suggested in his identification of emotion with variations of being-in-the-world.

We can, for example, see quite clearly what is shared between the gesture and its sense in the expression of emotions and in the emotions themselves: the smile, the relaxed face, and the cheerfulness of the gestures actually contain the rhythm of the action or of this joy as a particular mode of being in the world.<sup>32</sup>

Thereby, what is expressed in a gesture cannot be severed from such an expression. While the escalation of anger is encouraged by pounding one's fists on the table (think of Khrushchev and his UN appearance in 1960), calmly settling into a comfortable chair would moderate the power of anger and prevent it from escalating, as Kant rightly observed in his *Anthropology*:

If a person comes into your room in anger in order to say harsh words to you in fierce indignation, politely ask him to sit down; if you succeed in this, his scolding will already be milder, since the comfort of sitting is a relaxation that is not really compatible with the threatening gestures and screaming that can be used when standing.<sup>33</sup>

To sum up, the conduct is not merely the externalization of some internal state that would already be definite independently of its being expressed. Quite the contrary, our subjective feelings are moulded by the bodily postures we hold and the conducts we perform.

(3) Another reason to consider conducts not as consequences arising out of emotions, but rather as part and parcel of emotions themselves, lies in their capacity to disambiguate the original opacity of the affective setting. Emotional conduct clarifies the amorphous effect that most of the ongoing situations have upon us: it resolves the ambivalence of our bodily appraisals and affective stirrings by determining the stakes of the situation. To put it simply, while acting, we disambiguate our feelings towards persons and situations. Merleau-Ponty's claim about the ambivalence of the perceived world, applied to emotionality, amounts to a rejection of one-to-one correspondence between a myriad of affective solicitations and the limited range of value-judgments and conceptually identified emotions. Situations are ambivalent, our fellow beings not entirely predictable, our own concerns conflicting, the outcomes of our involvement uncertain. Which salient possibilities offered by an affective situation are to be actualized and developed in their consequences largely depends upon the action performed, the gesture expressed, the tone, the intensity or the smartness of the reply provided. The most obvious manner through which our conduct organizes the flow of affective experience resides in its verbal expression, such as declarations of love, admissions of guilt or shouting "Enough is enough!" Charles Taylor had previously emphasized the constitutive role of language in our affective life by asserting that until we express our feelings or emotions in words, they remain indeterminate.<sup>34</sup> Finding appropriate words results in the specification and re-arrangement of amorphous feelings. What Taylor omitted though is the illocutionary and perlocutionary dimension of such avowals. In many

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<sup>32</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 192.

<sup>33</sup> Kant 150.

<sup>34</sup> Taylor 70.



cases, we avow our desires or affective postures explicitly, because we strive to reconfigure our relationship with others.<sup>35</sup> To avow one's emotion publicly also entails assenting to what follows from its being expressed in the shared space. At the same time, to specify one's emotion publicly (and to endorse commitments resulting from it) is not only a matter of speech acts *stricto sensu*: nonverbal expressions are often functionally equivalent to verbal declarations in respect of disambiguation. We make explicit what we feel not merely with words, but also by means of bodily posture, the intonation of our voice, and facial displays such as laughter, crying or frowning. All these kind of expressive conducts and gestures challenge our surroundings precisely due to their diacritical value: the meaning of my gesture is understandable against the background of the whole variety of possible gestures that could have been performed at the given moment. For all these reasons, the particular manner in which I display my emotion publicly shapes the way it will unfold both within myself and within the space between me and other person(s) concerned by my emotional conduct.

(4) Because of the interaffective nature of most of our emotions, the ambiguity of the perceived and emotionally felt has to be unified and singled out not only through my own conduct, but also through my sensitivity to an interlocutor's emotional expressions. When frustrated by a partner's indolence, there is no single stimulus giving rise to one precise emotion, but rather a complex situation that I partly constitute in its meaning through overtly hostile or merely grumpy conduct and self-expression. I can display my discomfort in a more or less angry manner, make a mountain out of a molehill, or even diffuse the tension between us by making a well-meaning joke. At the same time, the unfolding of my emotions depends on whether my partner follows my lead, resists it, makes a scene, continues to escalate the situation or simply sweeps her own frustration under the carpet. Through our joint emotional conduct, we progressively enact several possible understandings of stakes involved in our shared and existentially open-ended situation. While facing an ambivalent and difficult situation, neither of us first observes our private emotions within ourselves in order to learn how to act on their basis, simply because there are no already fixated, definite items passively waiting inside us to be discovered through introspection. Rather than this, each participant's emotional reply discloses one of the meanings afforded by the situation that is experienced precisely as open-ended and not of one's own making. Thus, we both learn what we feel through playing it out in the space between us.

(5) These observations bring us close to recent attempts to overturn the mainstream cognitivist restriction to individualist accounts of the human mind in order to study emotions "in the wild", that is during our social interaction.<sup>36</sup> As already noted, I do not entirely master my emotional trajectory through my solitary conduct, since most of my emotional acting is situated in the social setting of joint agency, where my own emotional solicitations or invitations become the other's emotional affordances and vice-versa. During such interaffective dynamics, we are often challenged to display how we feel about some common issues of concern, which further encourages others to follow or resist our lead. Emotional displays are thus entangled in the back-and-

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<sup>35</sup> The account of emotions as strategies of relationship reconfiguration is provided by Parkinson et al. 216: "Emotions often [...] achieve exactly this kind of reconfiguration of relative positions in interpersonal space."

<sup>36</sup> Griffiths and Scarantino.

forth flow of ongoing interaction between participants. In my proposal, such interaction is best intelligible as dialogical interplay between my expressive conduct, which is perceived by the other as a challenge motivating her own conduct, which in turn motivates my further conduct and so on. Rather than being localized in any single turn of interaction, emotion unfolds over time and is gradually constituted by both participants in their ongoing exchange. In a similar vein, Merleau-Ponty observed that each of us modulates our conduct depending on who we are talking to, depending on the formal or informal setting of our encounter, performing this rather than that gesture, or exhibiting this rather than that attitude. When speaking about a dialogical situation, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that both I and my interlocutor are gradually drawn “into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator”.<sup>37</sup> The same, of course, applies to the emotional exchange and invites us to re-situate the emotions into the interactive space of mutually responding bodies. The anger of someone shouting at me is not hidden in his private mind: it is here, in this room, in the malice of his gesture, the cruelty of his speech and the threatening posture of his body. As Merleau-Ponty says in one of his lectures broadcast on French national radio: “It is in the space between him and me that [this anger] unfolds.”<sup>38</sup>

(6) Another argument for the action-oriented account of emotions is derived from their availability to normative assessments, since it is precisely *as* performances that emotions are accountable to the relevant standards which society imposes on their management. When emotions are evaluated as appropriate or inappropriate, it is far from simply being a matter of whether the judgment sustaining them is correct, as appraisal theories would have it. I can acknowledge that an offence has been committed or even agree with the reasons behind someone’s anger, and still deem that her anger – precisely as expressed through her loud shouting and insulting gestures – is an *inappropriate conduct* given the situation and the relational links between the participants. Once expressed in our overt conducts and acknowledged by relevant others, our emotions become our commitments, and only then do they take on moral significance and become rationally assessable for their appropriateness. As I have made clear above, I make no attempt to assimilate emotions to actions *stricto sensu*: clearly, most of them are not performed with an explicit aim or purpose in mind, so it is difficult to evaluate them as successful or unsuccessful.<sup>39</sup> Rather than this, they deserve to be characterized as conducts because they are to be performed more or less correctly. In acting out what I feel, I am supposed to live up to multiple expectations with regard to emotional expressions, which have been dubbed “display rules”.<sup>40</sup> These rules determine what is required from one’s emotional conduct given the specific status of the agent in a given context.<sup>41</sup> Of course, these rules are rarely made explicit; they are rather inculcated in our bodily habits during our upbringing. All of these internalized rules are further developed through our constant *éducation sentimentale* via books and movies enlarging our

<sup>37</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 370.

<sup>38</sup> Merleau-Ponty, “Man as Observed from Outside”, 83.

<sup>39</sup> In this, I part my ways with Solomon’s identification of emotions with actions. Solomon not only proposed an over-intellectualized account of emotions (emotions are actions, because they are judgements), but also endorses “a mind first account of action” that I propose to reject. For him, there is first a moment of judging, reasoning and deciding distinct from and preceding the moment of “doing”. Cf. Solomon, *Not Passion’s Slave*, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Ekman and Friesen 138.

<sup>41</sup> See Shields 4.

emotional repertoires. They are also refined by the corrective feedback provided by emotional interactions gone awry. Thanks to our habits, we implicitly and spontaneously feel what is proper and improper in a given social milieu. A PhD student will rarely explode in anger at her supervisor, despite her numerous omissions or disparaging remarks; instead, the emotional register of available conduct will include despair, a sense of bewilderment, regret, or bitterness, which will eventually result in further, reason-based actions such as switching supervisors or writing a formal complaint. Our emotional conduct is thus constantly underpinned by our embodied sense of correctness and incorrectness, which is rooted in our acquired but flexible habits and skills.

(7) The final argument for the intimate link between what we feel and what we do stems from notable cross-cultural differences in emotionally expressive behaviours and their meanings. The differences between emotional standards across cultures should not be considered a mere superficial make-up of biologically hard-wired emotional reactions, since these standards profoundly transform our innate dispositions to emotionally cope with all kinds of unsettling circumstances. When referring to various expressions of anger or love in different cultures, Merleau-Ponty claims that these differences impact the way in which we experience those emotions.

[...] the gesticulations of anger or love are not the same for a Japanese person and a Western person. More precisely, *the difference between gesticulations covers over a difference between the emotions themselves* [emphasis mine]. It is not merely the gesture that is contingent with regard to bodily organization, it is the very manner of meeting the situation and of living it.<sup>42</sup>

Cultural variations in emotional regimes imply that emotions cannot be equated with physiological reactions of the body to environmental stimuli, as argued by some contemporary authors who reduce emotions to automatic processes taking place in the “emotional brain”.<sup>43</sup> We do not *have* our emotions as if they were merely occurrent entities or objective happenings within our bodies: what matters is *how we use them* in order to cope with others and with the open-ended situations whose unfolding is largely determined by our effective conduct. Hence the astute complaint addressed by Frankenstein’s monster to his creator: “You gave me these emotions, but you didn’t tell me how to use them.”<sup>44</sup>

In addition to anthropological comparative studies of variations in emotional expression, historical excursions into the affective lives of our ancestors convince us that emotional experience is cultivated by social norms governing our conduct. Achilles’ grief over Patroclus, treated in the *Iliad* as an uncontrollable outburst with violent physiological manifestations, accompanied by shouting and hair-tearing, is not identical to the grief of a Roman citizen who is settled with *laudatio funebris* and leaves the expression of wrenching grief to his wife and maids, which takes on a ritualized form called *planctus*, wherein they “beat their breasts and indulge in loud lamentation”.<sup>45</sup> The grief of the nineteenth-century bourgeois family takes on yet a different form, observing a restraint of gestures, accompanied by ostentatious silence and calm, in

<sup>42</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 194–95. Emphasis mine.

<sup>43</sup> See LeDoux.

<sup>44</sup> See Kenneth Branagh’s movie *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein*.

<sup>45</sup> Corbin et al. T. II., 74.

order to better reveal a certain tragic “suspension of life”, as recommended by the 1893 *Rules of Etiquette in Modern Society*.<sup>46</sup> Thus, although the experience of grief spans the centuries, the very meaning attributed to this emotion changes, as does its form, intensity or strategic role within social and political life. From the premises stated above, it can be argued that not only people from different cultures express the same emotions in radically different ways, but they also undergo radically different emotional experiences. Such a counter-intuitive conclusion is easy to account for if we acknowledge the intimate link between the character of emotions and the manner in which they are performed, since all such performances are backed by explicit rules as well as by informal codes of conduct. The radical historicity of emotions thus provides yet another reason why we should not reduce them to states of the brain (triggered by innate mechanisms for which neurobiology would always have the last word).<sup>47</sup> Rather than this, they should be approached as conducts, since this is the most effective way to account for both their embodied character and their belonging to culture-specific value and norm systems.

### Once More with Feeling

Prior to conclude let me anticipate a two-ply objection concerning the role attributed to feelings in my account. First, by emphasizing the public and performative determinations of our affective life, have we not lost the feelings? Isn't there something private about our emotional life that accounting of emotions as conducts neglects? Second, aren't there cases of tensions between our supposedly “inner feelings” and “outward conduct”? The Czech poet Karel Hynek Mácha points to such emotional dissonance in one of the most famous verses of his lyrical ballad *May*: “A smile upon my lips, a sorrow in my heart.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, the objection continues, what we feel is not always and necessarily in accordance with what we express.<sup>49</sup>

As far as the first part of the objection goes, the so-called inner feelings are, on my account, part and parcel of the *motives* of emotional conduct. Although they don't require explicit awareness – they are rarely noticed and remain on the background – they play a crucial role in influencing our experience, evaluations and decision-making, inclining us with various degrees of intensity to act in specific ways. As I hope to have demonstrated, it is precisely our conduct that brings some of these tacit, pre-reflective motives to their ultimate determination. At the same time, feelings are not something that can be made perfectly transparent by means of reflection. First, they are not self-identical states, passively waiting to be discovered inside us, since they evolve in time so that their meaning can be grasped only retrospectively. Second, they unfold in unpredictable ways depending on our more or less successful coping with the emotional situation and the particular trajectory of coordinated exchange with other participants. In short, only our conduct can confirm and validate the centrality of this or that feeling in my life and my relation with others.

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<sup>46</sup> Corbin et al. T. II, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Švec 44.

<sup>48</sup> Mácha, *May*, 52. Compare with Virgil's lines “Spem vultu simulat, premit altum corde dolorem” (*Aeneid*, 1.209), where Aeneas has to serve as a leader providing hope to his troops even though his heart is broken with grief and anxiety, thus experiencing a clash between his actual inner feelings and their outward expression.

<sup>49</sup> I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for this objection and the opportunity to answer it.

Regarding the conflict between felt and displayed emotions, this is a frequent topic for sociologists of emotions who are interested in the rules imposing to display specific emotions as part of the job requirements. Many organizations thus compel their employees to display cheerful expressions, such as smiling, when dealing with customers, even though they may feel frustrated by the monotony of their tasks, as shown by Arlie Hochschild's seminal study of the "emotional labour" required of flight attendants.<sup>50</sup> In her book, Hochschild further distinguishes between "surface acting" in which a person merely "puts on" a smiling face with no corresponding feeling whatsoever and "deep acting", where a person actively tries to manage her emotions in line with the requirements of the employer. Despite this differentiation, her approach seems to suggest that, in both cases, our true inner feelings are diverted or distorted when we channel them for external purposes.<sup>51</sup> Both forms of emotional labour would thus result in emotional dissonance between our supposedly inner feelings, belonging to the private realm, and their standardized and artificial forms within public displays.

From my perspective, Hochschild's main argument about the alienating effects of emotional labour rests upon three prejudicial distinctions and identifications. First, her approach presumes that the private self is the opposite of the public self and that the former is the true one, while the latter is the artificial, constructed self. Second, she holds that our emotions and feelings are more genuine *before* they are acted out in the space between me and others, in which they are "processed and standardized". Third, emotion labour within a public space seems always alienating and distorting: either we simulate our outward expression or we twist our feelings and end up deceiving ourselves.

However, the outlook of emotions that I have outlined above compels us to be as cautious as possible if we are to speak of pure and genuine feelings that would become subsequently alienated. In fact, each one of us is constantly working on our feelings: we adjust them to protect our relationships and to enhance our commitments; we also suppress or minimize those that might jeopardize our prospective of increasing our individual powers by joining with others. In all of our encounters, we rely on social scripts, rituals and inculcated habits (both ours and other's) in order to anticipate the potential course of shared situations and avoid unnecessary conflicts. And so do waiters and flight attendants. All our emotional life is thus to be expressed within social constraints, peer-requirements and hierarchical structures. It is also useful to remind that all such norms for appropriate emotional response exist only insofar as there are individuals that enact them. Cases of affective discordances show that emotional are not performed as a mere reproduction of established norms. Rather, all such tensions incite emotional agents to reinvent, reappropriate or radically transform the established emotional styles.<sup>52</sup>

None of the above, however, prevents that in many cases the emotional labour of flight attendants can be truly alienating. There are indeed cases of tension between inner feelings and their outward expression, just as there are cases where emotions are merely feigned. However, the success of such pretending is critically dependent on the implicit

<sup>50</sup> Hochschild 153.

<sup>51</sup> "[...] emotion work, feeling rules, and social exchange have been removed from the private domain and placed in a public one, where they are processed, standardized, and subjected to hierarchical control". Hochschild 153.

<sup>52</sup> Subsequent studies on emotional labour have shown that although some established display rules are perceived as too restrictive, employees most often find flexible ways to appropriate them through deviations such as humour or hyperbole, allowing them to personalise interactions with customers and accommodate regulatory policies in their own distinctive way. See Leidner.

assumption that, in most of our affective interactions, our gestures and expressions actually coincide with what we are feeling. Furthermore, let us recall that faking emotional expressions is a transgression of the second conversational maxim identified by Grice as the condition of possibility for a meaningful exchange (one should strive to be truthful and avoid providing false information). This implies that most of our emotional expressions should manifest our true feelings; otherwise the communication would break down. There simply cannot be false or counterfeit banknotes unless most of them are genuine. The cases of fake expressions thus constitutes a mere exception confirming the general accordance between inner and outer dimensions of human affectivity.

Finally, our publicly manifested selves with their avowed inclinations and actions are more important than the feelings hidden deep within our souls. It is because my facial expressions, body postures, affective gestures, and vocal intonations have an impact on the final outcome of the situation. Since I am actively involved in what is happening through my expressive conduct, even my “mere acting” shapes my interaction patterns with others and ultimately my own emotional experience. Smiling flight attendants might eventually lift the spirits of their customers, which in turn will contribute to the cheerful atmosphere on board, reducing each party’s frustrations in this small and crowded space. Once again, what each participant feels and does is part of a larger trans-individual dynamic of affecting and being affected that exceeds one’s reflective grasp.

In the end, while it is true that social rules pertaining to expressive behaviours sometimes mess up with our individual feelings, predispositions and biographies, it does not mean that such norms and rules leave our emotional experiences intact. The result might be one of mixed feelings and we tend to account for such tensions in terms of inner/outer distinction. However, drawing distinctions between presumably *private feelings* and *public behaviour* should not blind us to their essential entanglements described above. Just as we should not fail to see that even forced or feigned emotional expressive conducts have an impact on emotional interaction with our environment: they serve to negotiate our shared situation and to suggest possible scenarios for its unfolding to others.

## Conclusion

To summarize, only if we adopt the above-mentioned redefinition of emotions in terms of conducts, can we explain why “I perceive the other’s grief or anger in his behaviour, on his face and in his hands,”<sup>53</sup> or why “it is *in* the blush that we perceive shame, *in* the laughter joy”.<sup>54</sup> The emphasis on the direct perception of another’s emotions was largely discussed within the phenomenological accounts of intersubjectivity in order to disqualify “the problem of other minds” in its diverse Cartesian reformulations. What I have strived to propose in my contribution points rather to a necessity to requalify emotions themselves in terms of expressive conducts through which we (a) disambiguate their content, regulate their intensity and shape their temporal unfolding; (b) manifest our commitments, disclose what we care about and make ourselves accountable to others and (c) engage in joint sense-making of the ongoing

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<sup>53</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 372.

<sup>54</sup> Scheler 10.

emotional situation. For all these reasons, we should not consider an already accomplished emotion as a prerequisite for its external expression, but rather the other way around: it is precisely through its expression in a certain style of conduct that the emotion finds its definite character.

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