Original Article

Affect and discourse – What's the problem? From affect as excess to affective/discursive practice

Margaret Wetherell
Psychology Department, University of Auckland, Private Bag, 92019, Auckland, 1142, New Zealand.

Abstract The recent 'turn to affect' in social and cultural research has been built on the notion of affect as a kind of excess. Affect is contrasted with the discursive and the cognitive, and distinguished from 'domesticated' emotion. The focus is on the presumed direct hit of events on bodies and on what is sensed rather than known. This formulation in combination with the need for new methods has disconnected discourse studies from research on affect. In common with other recent critics, I argue that the formulation of affect as an excess is unsustainable. I focus here, however, on the methodological consequences. The objective of affect research is to produce textured, lively analyses of multiple modes of engagement and to understand the working of power through patterns of assemblage. Intriguingly, fine-grain studies of discursive practice might realize these aims more effectively than some new, 'non-representational' methodological approaches. I contrast one example of non-representational empirical investigation with an example of discursive research on normative episodic sequences. My general aim is to build a more productive dialogue between rich traditions in discourse studies and new lines of research on affect and emotion.
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One of the most significant developments in recent years has been the renewed interest in affect and emotion in social research (Massumi, 2002; Sedgwick, 2003; Ahmed, 2004; Thrift, 2004, 2008a; Clough with Halley, 2007; Greco and Stenner, 2008; Seigworth and Gregg, 2010; Blackman, 2012). As Connolly (2002) argues, the turn (back) to affect is an acknowledgement that social and political events can work on citizens just

as a film works on an audience, inviting participation in roller coasters of identification, investment, disgust, elation and cynicism. Events can mediate an enthralling or terrifying embodied immersion (see also Berlant, 2005, 2008; Walkerdine, 2007; Protevi, 2009; Walkerdine and Jiminez, 2012).

Currently, the study of affect tends to mark out not just a research area but also particular theoretical and epistemological commitments, registered as various paradigmatic breaks. Affect emerged as a new kind of conceptual tool from readings of Deleuze, the philosophy of Spinoza, A. N. Whitehead and Henri Bergson (for example, Massumi, 2002; Barad, 2007; Motzkau, 2007; Stenner, 2008; Brown and Stenner, 2009; Williams, 2010). As Blackman (2007, 2008, 2010, 2012) describes, there are other, often surprising, genealogical connections, as some contemporary theorists revive the uncanny, and re-run the interest early 'fathers' (such as Tarde, LeBon and William James) expressed in the paranormal and in processes of suggestion and contagion.

Research on affect resonates particularly with a new focus on materiality and relationality, part of broader emphases on the interweaving of the material, the social, the biological and the cultural, exploring processes of their co-joint figuring and articulation (Haraway, 2004, 2008; Latour, 2004, 2005; Despret, 2004a, b). Affect studies often attempt to highlight the 'transpersonal and pre-personal' (Anderson, 2009), treating affect as an emergent property of extensive assemblages that construct affective atmospheres. Curiosity about affect intersects, too, with a turn to the 'post-human', a standpoint that attempts to engage equally and in an even-handed way, as cultural geographer Thrift (2008b, p. 83) puts it, with parrots, tool using Caledonian crows, humans and 'nature actors' such as oil. In these various guises, affect theory draws attention to the ways in which 'bodies' very broadly defined (human, animal, biological, technological, cultural), combine, assemble, articulate and shift into new formations, worked upon, as well as working on.

In this article, my concern is with human affect. I focus, in particular, on the relationship between affect and discourse. For many in affect studies (for example, Thrift, 2000, 2004, 2008a; Anderson, 2004, 2006; Dewsbury, 2003; Lorimer, 2005, 2008), one of the distinguishing aspects of affect scholarship is that it emphasizes processes *beyond*, *below* and *past* discourse. Human affect is formulated as a kind of 'extra-discursive' event (Massumi, 2002; Thrift, 2004, 2008a). This formulation, combined with the need for new methods to work at the limits of what can be readily verbalized, has provoked a very evident turn away from discourse studies. At what point, however, does this disconnect between affect and discourse impede social research?

I come at this question from social psychology and from a history of previous work in critical discourse studies (for example, Wetherell, 1998, 2007), bemused by the caricatured and generalized accounts of discourse research often found in

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affect scholarship, and by the absence of a productive dialogue between affect and discourse research. Like other recent critics (for example, Hemmings, 2005; Thien, 2005; Laurier and Philo, 2006; Gill and Pratt, 2008; Papoulias and Callard, 2010; Pile, 2010; Leys, 2011; Blackman, 2012), the separation of human affect from discourse, and from mindfulness, seems to me unsustainable. Not least, this is built on a deeply problematic psychology (Leys, 2011; Wetherell, 2012, Chapters 2 and 3). My aim in this article is not to dwell further on these critical points, however, but to try and grapple with the consequences for empirical research, and for method. I want to show in detail through the critical analysis of one example of a 'non-representational' investigation (McCormack, 2003), how the impasse between affect and discourse hampers affect research.

I also want to argue that it is time for affect scholars to engage again more thoroughly with discourse studies. The broad aim of affect theory is to deliver the tools required for lively, textured research on embodied social action and for productive insights into the entangled forms of assembling constituting social life moment to moment. Intriguingly, fine-grain studies of discourse practice might offer ways of doing this at a point where attempts to construct non-representational research seem to run into the sand. To demonstrate this, I will look in detail at one research example (Goodwin, 2006) from discourse studies on the normative episodic sequences found in naturally occurring interactions in girls' playgroups. This investigates, precisely, how talk, body actions, affect, material contexts and social relations assemble *in situ*.

My general approach is based on the concept of affective practice (Wetherell, 2012, in press) and on the application of practice theories (for example, Burkitt, 1997, 2002; Crossley, 2001, 2006; Schatzki *et al*, 2001; Reckwitz, 2002) to domains of emotion. I assume that the topic in social research on human affect and emotion is usually (and mostly unavoidably) articulations and recruitments of affect and meaning-making, and that social research requires methods that deal with entanglements of embodiment and discourse. One obvious candidate for the units of analysis in this domain are the emergent, open-ended, intertwined affective–discursive patterns evident in social life that operate rather like other social practices (such as cooking, sport, personal care, mothering and so on). The first two sections of the article will review the current disconnect between affect and discourse, followed then by discussion of the two specimen research examples, contrasting non-representational research on affect with fine-grain discourse research on affecting episodes.

Affect and Discourse – The Ambivalent Relation

To attend to affect is to stress the limits of reason and the limits of the immediately knowable and communicable. For Blackman and Venn (2010, p. 11), affect picks

out a realm of palpable experiences 'that do not operate through the structures of language, discourse and meaning'. Those interested in affect typically seek 'something that perhaps escapes or remains in excess of the practices of the "speaking subject" ' (Blackman and Venn, 2010, p. 9). Affect scholars attempt to take a more encompassing view of social action, working with the 'sensual, haptic, corporeal or kinaesthetic' (Blackman and Cromby, 2007, p. 7), redirecting attention to the 'somatically sensed' body, to perceptions, memories, feelings, forms of muscular movement and proprioceptive responses to vibrations and rhythms.

Given these objectives, it is not surprising that the turn to affect is correlated with a turn away from discourse methods. Research focused primarily on interpreting and working with patterns in talk and text seems unlikely to deliver. Scepticism about the value of discourse research extends across the range of discourse approaches: from Foucauldian inspired work on discursive formations and critical post-structuralist theory (for example, Massumi, 2002; Sedgwick, 2003; Stewart, 2007), to concerns about the overly docile bodies in discourse research (Cromby, 2007; Blackman and Venn, 2010), to doubts about qualitative research based on narrative (Clough, 2009), to critiques of more fine-grain work in discursive psychology and conversation analysis (for example, Blackman and Cromby, 2007; Brown *et al*, 2009).

Sedgwick (2003), for instance, argues staunchly that critical theory has become overly enmeshed in a paranoid reading strategy – the act of critical unmasking has become the only possible analytic mode. In her work (with Adam Frank) advocating Silvan Tomkins' theory of affect, Sedgwick lambasts Cvetkovich's (1992) broadly discursive and social constructionist approach for its failure to actually engage with feelings. Sedgwick and Frank argue that the routine anti-biologism and anti-essentialism (characteristic of critical discursive work in the 1990s) closed down the detailed investigation of embodied states. In a similar vein, Stewart (2007, pp. 1–4) makes a case for focusing on what she calls the 'immanent, obtuse and erratic' and for dwelling on the ways 'in which a reeling present is composed out of heterogeneous and non-coherent singularities' in preference to the usual focus on semantic meaning and symbolic signification. Equally, Massumi (2002, p. 12) argues that the social and cultural constructionism typical of critical theory and post-structuralism ignores the moment of becoming, ontogenesis and qualitative growth because it is overly preoccupied with 'codings, griddings and positionings'.

For many, concerns arise when the body is read off simply as an effect of talk and texts (Cromby, 2007; Blackman and Venn, 2010). Discursive research, it is argued, prioritizes representational thinking and observation. It emphasizes seeing and listening, as embodied experience is turned into a narrative. Blackman and Venn (2010, p. 16) maintain that this mode of research is more likely to treat the body as 'inert mass' or as 'dumb materiality of corporeality'. Discursive research is more likely too, they suggest, to conceptualize the social as just an 'influence', acting on a singular and separate individual body, and will fail to

do justice to the entangling of processes and phenomena recognized by more relational studies.

Reinforcing this, Clough (2010, p. 223) writes in favour of engaging more deeply with what she calls the 'sciences of unthinking' and anticipates 'toppling from a privileged position […] semiotic chains of signification and identity and linguistic-based structures of meaning making'. Clough (2009) is sceptical about the value of the interpretive process in qualitative research when, for example, narrative researchers ask people to formulate stories about their experiences and then go on to further interpret those accounts. She advocates a more direct focus on the engagement of bodies in social scenes as opposed to more dabbling in the endless sea of words.

Blackman and Cromby (2007) are particularly critical of fine-grain research in discursive psychology and conversation analysis (Hepburn, 2004) which attempts, for example, to transcribe crying, turning sobs into marks and transcription symbols on the page. For Brown *et al* (2009, p. 202), '[t]he body and its sensed felt engagement with the world around it is rarely represented as such in discursive work in psychology. When it is, it must be converted into either *talk around the body* or as the *embodied grounds of talk*'. In their view, neither of these strategies is adequate.

To a large extent the critics have a point. Discursive research did become hegemonic in certain areas of social research; criticism did more or less proceed in a 'paranoid' manner in Sedgwick's terms. Many areas of discursive research are not well suited to either notice or investigate embodiment. Many of the points made by recent critics resonate, too, with the extensive internal debates within discourse studies (for example, Schegloff, 1997; Wetherell, 1998; Billig, 1999), concerning the overly deterministic tendencies in post-structuralist discourse theory and the tendencies of fine-grain work to refuse to raise its gaze from the transcribed marks on the page.

One would expect that particularly for those engaged in empirically researching human affect, disenchantment would have given way by now, however, to some attempt at rapprochement and integration. The call for new emphases and for new ways of working does not in itself, of course, rule out a productive dialogue with research in discourse studies. Indeed, the turn to affect opens up crucial questions about meaning-making practices, the articulation of the somatic with these, and issues about how the speaking subject makes sense of and communicates affect. Above all, affect researchers emphasize assemblage, relationality, articulation and entanglement (see Latour, 2004; Thrift, 2008a; Blackman, 2012). An obvious entanglement for human social actors occurs routinely between embodied states and the semiotic. Why, then, is there still so little dialogue between affect scholars and discourse research? The explanation, in my view, seems to lie in one of the principal ways in which affect has been formulated within the turn. As a result, productive scepticism concerning the limits of discourse research and a push for new approaches seems to have turned into an impasse.

Affect and Discourse – The Emergence of an Impasse

For some leading affect theorists, such as Massumi (2002) and Thrift (2004, 2008a), the reaction against discourse studies is more far-reaching than a simple, strategic decision to hold discourse (semiotics, studies of talk and text) in abeyance while new methods are initiated and canvassed. Massumi and Thrift's accounts of the relation between affect and discourse have been extraordinarily influential. They present a kind of mash-up from a range of mostly traditional social psychological and psychobiological sources such as EEG studies and social psychological research on automaticity, and in Thrift's (2004, 2008a) case adding also elements of Damasio's neuroscience and Darwin's evolutionary theory. Affect is positioned as a kind of 'non-representational' domain (Thrift, 2004, 2008a) or excess (Massumi, 2002). As Blackman (2012, p. 11) describes, these approaches argue that: 'power works "autonomically", bypassing reason and criticality and seizing the body at the level of neural circuits, the nervous system, the endocrine system or other systems assumed to work independently of cognition'.

Massumi (2002), for instance, confidently claims that the world impinges (affects and has effects) on the body first. Affect is only subsequently, after a half-second time lag, picked up by the speaking, thinking, conscious, cognizing and representing subject (c.f. also Clough, 2007, p. 2). He maintains that affect is thus a kind of intensity, making a difference below the threshold of consciousness, thrusting the subject into particular kinds of relations with the material and social world. Consciousness is derivative and second-hand in this view, inadequate as a guide to the process of 'being affected'. Similarly, musing on the short period in which the body is first activated, Thrift (2000, p. 34) describes it as 'that small but vitally significant period of time in which the body makes the world intelligible by setting up a background of expectation'.

Massumi (2002, p. 219) argues that discourse works on a different track from affect – a 'quality' track as opposed to the 'intensity' track. The quality track leads to naming, and to the framing of affect in conventional discursive, linguistic and cultural terms. If affect is a kind of chaotic excess and an unprocessed push, then the moment of discursive representation is bureaucratic and organizational. For Massumi, it is the process by which potentially 'wild' affect is tamed, turned into something people can recognize, talk about to each other and communicate as 'domesticated' emotion. Needless to say, both Massumi and Thrift want to privilege the 'wilder' partner, what Thrift describes as the 'roiling mass of nerve volleys' (2008a, p. 7), 'embodied dispositions (instincts if you like)' (2000, p. 36), all seen as beyond the 'threshold of contemplative cognition' (McCormack, 2003, p. 488).

This dominant Massumi/Thrift analysis of affect and discourse is beginning to be extensively criticized (for example, Hemmings, 2005; Laurier and Philo, 2006; Gill and Pratt, 2008; Pile, 2010; Leys, 2011; Blackman, 2012;

Wetherell, 2012, in press). Leys (2011), for instance, forensically takes apart the psychological studies on which Massumi's argument is based and argues that the foundations are flimsy (see also Wetherell, 2012, Chapters 2 and 3). Interestingly, the direction of travel in those central 'sciences of the unthinking' – neuroscience and psychobiology – supports more integrated accounts. The claim that meaning-making and embodied affect separate chronologically (with affect first), dividing into different 'tracks', would be seen by many affective scientists as implausible.

Scherer (2005, p. 314), a leading emotion researcher in experimental psychology, for instance, works on the principle that a burst of affect involves the 'synchronous recruitment of somatic and mental resources'. Damasio (1999), the neuroscientist perhaps most frequently drawn upon by social researchers, is contradictory in his emphases, but argues that everyday emotional experience is a functional continuum. This continuum, he maintains, is a 'running polyphony' (1999, p. 43) making up the fabric of body/mind. It consists of continuous cycles of bodily responses, changes in representations of body states, consciousness of feelings likely to trigger new embodied responses and so on. Experimental psychologists Barrett (2009) and Russell (2003) equally suggest a contingent, plastic and flexible, constructive feedback process, as core affects (core embodied, psycho-physiological states) are simultaneously perceived, organized, categorized, labelled and communicated becoming socially recognizable 'emotions'. Any initial bodily hit, in other words, is always already occurring within an ongoing stream of meaning-making or semiosis. We cannot stop the clock, start it just from some constructed moment of initial impingement, and ignore the meaning-making contexts and histories that so decisively shape the encounters between bodies and events (Wetherell, in press).

Developments in experimental psychology and psychobiology aside (and I do not want to suggest accepting affective science uncritically), the problems with the assumption of a radical cut between affect and discourse come most sharply into view when we look at how researchers have tried to operationalize this cut in their empirical work. As the next section will try to show, as we come up against affect in practice, it becomes even clearer that the moment of 'intensity' is indissolubly linked to the history of 'quality' (in Massumi's terminology). It becomes more and more difficult to sustain the chronology Massumi and Thrift propose, or the assumption that humans first encounter the world bodily and then secondarily discursively.

Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) – Affect Research Minus Discourse

The research example I want to discuss in some detail comes from the non-representational theory (NRT) movement in cultural geography (Thrift, 2000, 2004, 2008a; Anderson, 2004, 2006; Dewsbury, 2003; Lorimer, 2005, 2008)

and reports an investigation of Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) (McCormack, 2003). McCormack displays an exemplary adherence to the affect/discourse splits postulated by Massumi and Thrift. His work has to be respected as a disciplined and comprehensive attempt to develop new ways of investigating. But I want to suggest that this study also reveals the huge difficulties and contortions involved in attempting to separate the affective from the discursive.

DMT emerged in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. McCormack describes it as a practice that uses dance and movement as a way of encouraging direct emotional expression, creating a new medium for the display of unconscious dynamics, and encouraging therapeutic insight and transformation through reflections on what emerges. If conventional psychoanalysis encourages patients to free associate in words, then DMT encourages free association through body movements, reconnecting the physical and psychological aspects of experience. McCormack's own empirical investigations of DMT included ethnographic observation and immersion as a participant in weekly sessions and Summer Schools.

McCormack comes to his study with a number of methodological and theoretical ambitions. Following NRT, he wants to trace phenomena occurring beneath the 'threshold of contemplative cognition' and he wants to do justice to these in ways that do not prioritize representational sense making (2003, p. 488). His focus will be on embodiment and the diversity of ways in which bodies might engage beyond language and discourse, 'beyond the deliberative and reflective consistencies of representational thinking' (p. 490). He will emphasize movement, flow and the unfolding of events in space. The emergent and 'transformative potential' (p. 490) will be favoured over the already structured. Following Massumi (2002), McCormack is clear that he is not interested in emotion *per se*. Emotion is too discursive, already invaded by texts, symbols and representations. Emotion is what happens to affect, and McCormack is interested in the pre-interpreted, the non-subjective and the pre-personal.

The methodological challenges involved are enormous. First, McCormack has to divide what seems to be a highly elaborated affective–discursive practice and psy-technique (in Rose's, 1998 terms) into component parts, and then rigorously strip out the discursive part, leaving just the movements in DMT and what unfolds in the moment. Analysis of the craft theory being applied, the psychosocial apparatus being mobilized, the process of therapeutic reflection, and the voices and the narratives of the practitioners and the participants must be left to one side.

However, there is a second challenge: How to study the movements, what bodies do, and affect in itself, and how to describe what is found to the reader of the article? If the interest is in events below the threshold of representation then language is truly at its limits. As Laurier and Philo (2006) note, fieldwork has reached an impasse when it formulates its object as unspeakable. Pile (2010) makes the same point in his discussion of McCormack's study:

> Like emotions, affects matter – but they cannot be grasped, made known, or represented. This would appear to leave affectual geography with a problem: its archetypal 'object of study' – affect – cannot, by its own account, be shown or understood. (p. 9)

McCormack describes how he gradually learnt a way of engaging. His paper presents a series of extended descriptions of typical DMT exercises, narrated moment by moment from an 'I' perspective, with changes in the type face such as extending words, using capitals and bold, plus small diagrammatic sketches, to add texture. McCormack also adds in short reflections, instructing the reader familiar with NRT how to read and contextualize what is going on.

Here are two examples:

> We reverse roles and I find myself closing my eyes and he is taking my hand and finding a comfortable way to hold it, before beginning to move, sensing the shape of our relating, walking, side by side, with our hands slightly out in front, moving, feeling the touch, the micro pressure, a sensing of changing directions, directions that guide, but that also are promptings, anticipations of what might be happening around the room, or what, or where, next, directions that move through a stream of sunlight, the light appearing more obviously sensuous …. (p. 497)

> To one side, while this is happening, a therapist puts the theme from *Star Wars* on a stereo in the room. We all begin to move around the room, some with light sabres in hand, as other shapes, other movements come into play; spaceships, aliens …
> What happens here is not that the stick works as a representation of *Star Wars*. The stick represents nothing. Rather than a matter of representation, the event of this encounter is transversally catalytic. It catalyses the virtual in the actuality of moving bodies. What is catalysed here is the *Star Wars affect*, an abstract yet moving complex of gestural, figural and musical refrains that, by dint of repetition has crossed a threshold of cultural consistency. (pp. 489–499)

McCormack's work is a honourable exception to the trend for cultural research on affect to remain entirely theoretical, hardly daring to risk even anecdotal examples of affect in action. He attempts the empirical, but in doing so I think he shows why dividing affect from discourse creates a straitjacket for empirical work and renders it virtually impossible.

McCormack's own movement narratives reproduced above show absolutely clearly (if any demonstration were needed) that affect cannot be neatly and surgically separated from discourse and representations. His accounts act as a refutation of his argument. The extracts above are pieces of discourse, language

acts, entirely imbued with representation and redolent with 'contemplative cognition'. Do they communicate events below the threshold of representation? Clearly, not in any direct unmediated way, although McCormack seems to be attempting this. He maintains it is possible. However, his dense descriptions are no less representational than the testimony and narratives of the other participants, which he chose not to include because of their already interpreted and after the fact nature. His representations paradoxically try to communicate affect beyond representation, and the supposedly unspeakable, in all the pragmatic, convenient, sophisticated and wonderful ways that language makes possible (Laurier and Philo, 2006, p. 353). In Laurier and Philo's elegant phrase, the 'wordy world' entangles McCormack still. However, McCormack's standpoint entails that this will be an entirely non-reflexive entanglement with the wordy world. He can throw no light on his own narrative formations. He cannot reflexively examine how he has constructed his own text because that would involve admitting that affect has escaped.

From Affect Minus Discourse to Affective–Discursive Practice

Affect scholars are clear about their goals. They desire forms of research that take embodiment seriously. They emphasize the entangled nature of events and the ways in which multiple figurations interact to produce the sites, scenes and episodes of social life. In addition, theorists such as Sedgwick (2003, p. 16) make a pitch for focusing on the 'middle ranges of agency', paying more attention to the everyday human muddle found between the two extremes typically set up in critical social theory – extreme capitulation to the domination of discursive formations and the neo-liberal fantasy of individuated, entirely free, actor/agent.

Sedgwick also makes a passionate plea for learning from the experience of texture.

> I haven't perceived a texture until I've instantaneously hypothesized whether the object I'm perceiving was sedimented, extruded, laminated, granulated, polished, distressed, felted or fluffed up. Similarly to perceive texture is to know or to hypothesise whether a thing will be easy or hard, safe or dangerous to grasp, to stack or to fold, to shred, to climb on, to stretch, to slide, to soak. Texture makes a nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity – to touch is already to reach out, fondle, heft, tap, enfold and always to understand that other people or natural forces have done this already before in the making of the textured object.

Textured sensations are a model for what should be central in social research – texture is perceived by the body and involves repetitive pattern. The experience

is organized, yet that organization is inarticulate, felt and intuited rather than systematized, hovering 'below the level of shape or structure' (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 16).

In a similar vein, Brown *et al* (2009) make a case for basing affect research on 'complexes of activities'. They report a series of investigative journeys designed to find methods that could access embodied experience directly. These forays were motivated by a wish to work beyond discursive psychology, and 'let bodies speak in their own right'. One such attempt involved the research group visiting a luminarium, or 'a series of large interconnected tent-like chambers. It was made out of a fabric which, when seen from the inside and illuminated only by daylight, was very brightly illuminated' (2009, p. 206). The group members wrote individual memories of the experience and then discussed these. However, the memories were disappointingly diverse, and the members concluded that there was little usable that fulfilled the aim of capturing the embodied experience.

Reflecting on this, Brown *et al* (2009, p. 211) turn to the pragmatic philosophy of John Dewey. Dewey argued that context and function are central to grasping the nature of action. 'There are no clear-cut distinctions between subject and object, stimulus and response'. For Brown *et al*, the key, then, is to find ways of researching that connect embodied experience (actions and discrete memories) with the whole activity complex in which the experience is embedded. Research on embodied experience must begin in a different place – not with a stimulus or with a response, but with the whole pattern unfolding or coming into being.

The wish list for method in affect research thus includes a focus on: embodiment, entanglement, the middle ranges of agency, patterns that organize but cannot necessarily be articulated, and the importance of taking action complexes as the main units of analysis. This begins to suggest a strong potential resonance between affect research and notions of social practice. More to the point here, I want to demonstrate that fine-grain research on discourse practices might be a good place to search for viable forms of research that meet these criteria. A focus on discourse may not be an automatic problem, but part of the solution. In the next section, I will examine one typical piece of discursive research on naturally occurring practice, to encourage affect scholars to look again at approaches and methods in discourse studies.

Embodied Activity Flows in Playgrounds – Affect Plus Discourse Plus Practice

The example I have chosen (see also Wetherell, 2012, Chapter 4) comes from the work of conversation analyst and linguistic anthropologist, Marjorie Goodwin (2006). Goodwin has spent considerable time developing and analysing patterns

in detailed records (video and audio) of girls' activities in school playgrounds. Her work beautifully and poignantly reveals the ways in which various 'small worlds' are put together in the moment.

Goodwin's research is guided by a number of key assumptions (see also C. Goodwin, 2000). First, her focus is on what she calls, following Goffman (1961), the 'situated activities' characteristic of 'encounters'. For Goffman, as Goodwin (2006, p. 7) reports, encounters are orchestrated moments of embodied interaction such as lovemaking, boxing, dancing and card games. Situated activities are emergent patterns of practice, recognized by participants, even if they could not explicitly articulate the patterns involved, which are bound up with questions of value and with local moral orders. Situated activities are flexible and contingent. They are oriented variably to contexts, but also often demonstrate repetitive, relatively ordered, recurrent features. They are pretty much the activity complexes stressed by Brown *et al* (2009), in other words.

Goodwin explores both affect and discourse equally and assumes these are entangled in the sense that embodied action (on a scale of intensity) tends to be bound up with talk at some point in a flow of activity. This entangling may occur either through patterns of utterances associated with activities in the moment or occur subsequently as participants begin to account for, communicate and make sense of their actions. Indeed, entangling has always/already occurred as participants' current actions usually orient to past familiar practice, and thus are recognizable and meaningful to others. History is brought into the present moment.

Following ethnomethodological principles, Goodwin argues that researchers can look to participants' accounts and how they make their actions meaningful for other participants to understand the practices in which they are engaged. In line with practice theory (Schatzki *et al*, 2001), her work takes for granted that embodied flows of activity demonstrate both 'texture' and 'middle ranges of agency' in Sedgwick's (2003) senses. The flow of activity is both constrained by past practice and the immediate situation and context, and open-ended in the sense that 'things can always be otherwise' (Edwards, 1997).

Goodwin (2006) describes her work as 'multimodal'. What this term suggests is not just that a flow of situated activity engages bodies and talk but that also it engages and organizes spaces and physical objects and reflects their existing histories of organization. A focus on situated activity and practice implies attention to integrated and organic interweavings across multiple domains. Borrowing from affect terminology, one could say that Goodwin is interested in the *assemblages* and *articulations* of practices across multiple modalities that make up the girls' playground activities and their lived worlds in this milieu.

To illustrate these points, I want to look in more detail at two examples from Goodwin's research. The first is a very brief embodied episode, where the intensity of affect combines with utterances as part of the broader systems of situated activity making up recurring playground practices. Goodwin describes

a commonplace normative episodic sequence in girls' playground lives as they play hopscotch.

Example 1 (Goodwin, 2006, p. 39)

Marisol:	((jumps and lands on some lines))	**Problematic move**
Carla:	***OUT! OUT!***	**Out!** ((finger point))
	((replays Marisol's move on grid))	
	PISASTE LA DE A***QUÍ***	**Explanation**
	You stepped on this one	
	((steps on square))	**Demonstration**
	Y LA DE AC***Á***	
	and this one.	
	((steps on square))	

As Goodwin explains, Carla is accusing Marisol (both Spanish speakers) of having violated the rules and thus having lost her turn at jumping through the hopscotch squares drawn on the ground. Carla's cry is very loud and can be heard as very aggrieved. Goodwin reports that the normal pitch of the girls' speech is between 250 and 350 Hz, although in this ***OUT! OUT!*** cry, Carla's voice leaps and escalates markedly in pitch, and she massively extends the duration of the cry for very many milliseconds. Goodwin's stills from the videotape show that Carla's utterance is backed up by a contorted facial expression and by dramatic gestures. Still in the crouching position she had assumed to watch Marisol's jumping feet, Carla points vehemently at Marisol with her arm extended out as far as it will go. She then stands up and replays Marisol's moves on the hopscotch grid illustrating what she did wrong. Although Marisol does not say anything, she is swept up in this torrent of affect/discourse. As Carla's accusing finger points at her, the still from Goodwin's video, reproduced in her text, shows that Marisol adopts a body stance that is in fact quite hard to describe, somewhere between a cringe, a smile and a shrug. She looks embarrassed, amused and annoyed, engaged in what looks like it could be the local, relational, affective counterpoint to a justified accusation that catches one out in an illegitimate act.

Body movements and facial expressions and so on are intimately choreographed and patterned with talk in this very brief episode and the whole complex does impressive amounts of identity work in a nanosecond. Carla's talk and her body movements, for instance, demonstrate her affective positions. She is first a judge and then an accuser. The pattern is part of a recognizable affective–discursive practice. As Goodwin (2006, p. 40) states, '… affect is lodged within embodied sequences of action. Moreover, the phenomena that provide organization for both affect and action are distributed through multiple media within a larger field of action'.

The sequence presented in Example 1 is part of a relatively simple affective practice. Goodwin goes on to look at some of the more extended and complex

social practices of girl's friendship groups such as gossip events, disputes, assessments and even the persistent degradation rituals addressed at a marginal member of one group. The picture she paints is of loosely ordered socio-political life the girls share. Their playground lives are constituted from engrossing, persistent, repetitive but creative forms of collective activity. Affect supplies much of the texture of these practices and renders them highly involving and highly invested. However, this affect is not random. Its nature and display is shaped by the girls' broader activities, determined by the unfolding sequences in which it is embedded.

Let me illustrate with one of Goodwin's examples of persistent affective positioning. This interaction involves three girls, Angela, Aretha and Sarah, sitting together talking. Goodwin argues that what unfolds is characteristic of the ways in which Angela is often targeted in the group.

Example 2 (Goodwin, 2006, pp. 222–223)

Angela:	**I**- I mean like- **you** guys are like-
	I don't **judge any**body because you guys know,
	that like I just, you know, follow you guys.
	((shoulder moves in time with words))
	Wherever you guys go, but um,
Sarah:	You're like a **tag**. You tag along. ((left palm
	extended with arm bent towards Angela))
	Basically- Angela tags along. =
Angela:	So,
Sarah:	That's it. = right?
Angela:	So like- **Yeah**. ((shoulder shrug))
Sarah:	Right Angela? Admit it. Eh heh heh!
Angela:	Yeah like- whatever.
Sarah:	AD**MIT** IT ANGELA!
Sarah:	ADMIT IT! ((extends arms palm up to Angela))
Angela:	O**KAY**! ((leaning towards Sarah))
Sarah:	Say it. "**You**:: (.) are:: (.) **I**: am **a**: (.)"
	((using hands as if conducting on each beat,))
	((then extends hands palm up towards Angela
	as if asking her to complete the utterance))
Angela:	I'M A **TAG**-ALONG girl! ((jerks body in
	direction of Sarah))
	(0.4)
Sarah:	**Good** girl! eh heh!
Angela:	I'm going to **get** you! ((play fight))
Sarah:	heh-heh O**ka**(**hh**)y.
	heh-heh hmh-hmh-hnh-hnh-hnh!
Angela:	Okay!

There is a complex act of embodied positioning and affective practice taking place here. Angela is being described as a 'tag along girl' and coached by Sarah: she is made to repeat this description of herself. In being described as such, and through the repetition of the description, Angela's marginal status is also being accomplished, performed and continued.

Goodwin notes the non-randomness of the choice of Angela as the excluded one. This is a middle-class school with some very wealthy parents. The group of girls is diverse in terms of ethnicity and social class, but Angela combines together two more marginal identities in this context – she is African-American and from a working-class background. The patterning of her actions, such as her practices around eating, are 'remarkable' to the other girls and become the basis of this long-term construction of her as 'other' to their more shared culture.

It might seem that we could understand what is going on here in relatively familiar social research terms as the imposition of a role upon Angela. All the detailed paraphernalia of conversation analysis and its transcription technologies turning an event into words on paper might seem rather redundant. However, as Goodwin would no doubt point out, this is misleading. If we look back at how the interaction is unfolding, and the layers added by the detail of the words, movements, turn-taking, intonation patterns and so on, we see something a bit more complicated and interesting than 'contempt', 'exclusion' or 'humiliation'. We see, in other words, an affective–discursive practice emerging along with complex acts of subject positioning rather than, say, an emotion moving to 'land' on one individual. This is joint, coordinated, relational activity in which affect and discourse twine together.

In an odd way, Angela is being included through what seems to be a familiar ritual marking her difference and exclusion. Familiar practice or ritualized sequence depends on reflexive awareness about how the practice plays out and how the scene works. The transcript suggests that having done this bit of usual practice jointly, the girls can move on together to something else, to play fight together and continue their chat. The interaction opens with Angela attempting a characterization of her own conduct – she is not someone who judges anybody, she follows the other girls around – presumably she is referring back to some earlier event or conversation. Sarah seizes the opportunity, however, to develop a marginalizing re-formulation of Angela's actions – this is not following, it is 'tagging along'. Angela's resigned response ('whatever') suggests this process of negative re-formulating her actions is not news to her. It is not something she contests and it seems to rely on a version of her identity that is already consensual, already familiar and available. Her repetition of Sarah's words, when she is exhorted to do so, becomes a kind of performance in this context. The jerky body movements and the recapitulation of Sarah's emphatic and bossy speaking rhythm mark this out for anyone observing as an instructed or coerced re-enactment.

Again, it would seem nonsensical to try and separate here the moment of affect from the discourse, or the track of 'intensity' from the track of 'quality' in

Massumi's terms, or the speaking subject from affect that escapes or exceeds. Affect and discourse are indissolubly and tightly woven together in Sarah's emphatic assertions and, then, differentially, in Angela's re-enactment. The whole affective–discursive practice emerging in this scene with Angela should be the unit of analysis along with the ways in which this practice articulates with the other practices that make up the 'small world' of this girls' friendship group.

Conclusion

My aim in this article has been relatively limited. I wanted to begin a process of rapprochement and a new round of dialogue between discourse studies and affect studies. I described affect scholars' valid reasons for becoming dissatisfied with discourse methods. However, I noted that when these grounds for disenchantment become combined with an unsustainable psychological theory of how affect hits human bodies, an impasse is created that stifles productive research. Through a critique of one candidate example of non-representational research, I tried to show how new empirical research on affect must come back again to the study of discourse with fresh eyes. It would be unfortunate if the critique of discourse, and the disconnecting of affect from discourse in theory, should blind affect scholars to rich traditions of work that could be directly relevant to their practical aims and objectives.

I tried to demonstrate how some forms of fine-grain discursive research actually exemplify many of the features valued by affect scholars. This is certainly not work that ignores embodiment, treats bodies as 'inert mass' and 'dumb corporeality', or is unable to 'investigate the social as anything other than an influence', to reiterate typical critiques. Goodwin's research, and similar work, effectively conveys the feel and patterning of bodies in action, the lively flow of social life and sticks closely to participants' perspectives. The reason it is more successful (and the reason why affect scholars have struggled empirically) is because this research genuinely does work beyond a simple binary of affect versus discourse, and is not trammelled by having to identify a mode of experience forever exceeding and escaping the 'speaking subject'. Instead, it puts both affect and discourse back where they should be within emergent patterns of situated activity, and makes these patterns, as they need to be, the main research focus.

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About the Author

Margaret Wetherell is an Emeritus Professor in Social Psychology at the Open University, UK and Professor of Social Psychology at University of Auckland, New Zealand. She is a former Chief Co-Editor of the *British Journal of Social Psychology*, and from 2003–2008 she was Director of the ESRC *Identities and Social Action* Programme. Her current research is on affective/discursive practice, privilege and colonization. She has published widely in discourse and identity studies and her writings have been translated into six languages. Her most recent book is *Affect and Emotion* (2012, London, Sage).

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