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The Feeling Body: Affective Science Meets the Enactive Mind. Giovanna Colombetti. Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2014, 270 pages, \$42.00 hardcover.

Reviewed by Patrick Seniuk, Södertörn University, Stockholm

Giovanna Colombetti's book, *The Feeling Body: Affective Science Meets the Enactive Mind*, is a novel contribution to the affective science literature addressing emotion theory.¹ Her book critically leads readers through several influential theories that developed out of early scientific research on emotions. She re-evaluates the conceptual veracity of these theories (and their legacy) on their own terms, as well as from within the contemporary context of affective science. This context, whose goal posts have shifted substantially on the heels of post-modern theory, continues to be redefined under the emergent influence of approaches such as that of enactive mind and embodied cognition. Colombetti taps into the bodily-inspired zeitgeist by incorporating philosophical phenomenology as a way to exploit the theoretical and experiential shortcomings she attributes to traditional theories of emotion. The book is successful, if viewed as a cogent survey of the theoretical landscape in affective sciences. The phenomenologically inspired chapters on embodiment, however, are less auspicious. While enactivism and embodiment share a theoretical affinity, the book fails to deliver an exacting synthesis of these two perspectives. With this in mind, my review explores Colombetti's unique conceptualization of affective intentionality, followed by a discussion of the phenomenological shortcomings found in Chapter 4.

According to the picture sketched by Colombetti, the science of emotion has tended toward a basic dichotomy between physiological and psychological explanatory frameworks. This division includes theories that ostensibly attempt, but fail, to synthesize both aspects in a holistic model. To properly appreciate the nature of emotions, Colombetti argues that the best way to illustrate that emotions are dimensional, dynamic, and embodied, is to adopt the enactive mind approach (with a phenomenological sensibility). She stipulates that a robust conception of emotions should bear fidelity to the way emotional episodes are experienced by an agent, something she believes traditional theories of emotion have failed to take seriously. Keeping with the trend of embodiment in the cognitive sciences — with help from phenomenological philosophy — Colombetti is committed to the premise that the body is a necessary pre-condition providing humans the capacity for emotional experience.

The term “affect” has acquired a conceptually broad and fluid meaning across various academic disciplines. Colombetti's approach to affect retains that broad quality, but stipulates the sense it is intended to index, namely that to be affected is to display “a *lack of indifference* [. . .] and a sensibility or *interest* for one's existence” [p. 1, emphasis original]. The first chapter is an attempt to delineate the conceptual boundaries of affect, which results in the novel

Correspondance concerning this review should be addressed to Patrick Seniuk, Södertörn University, School of Culture and Education MA 795b, 141 89 Huddinge, Sweden. Email: Patrick.seniuk@sh.se

¹Page references to *The Feeling Body* will be denoted in brackets.

formulation of “primordial affectivity,” a concept that anchors the entire argument of the book. Unsurprisingly, primordial affectivity dovetails well theoretically with enactivism and phenomenology. Primordial affectivity is a feature common to all living organisms, and is characterized by an organism’s world-directed striving or purposefulness. Colombetti contends that “even the simplest living systems have a capacity to be sensitive to what matters to them, and in this sense they are affective” [p. 2]. Simply stated, to be affected is to move or be moved by something *in the world*. It is important to note that the argument does not claim all living systems are conscious, “rather, the simplest living systems already realize a relationship with themselves and the world in which they are situated that entails purposefulness and concern for their existence” [p. 2].

Although there is certainly a resemblance to Heidegger’s ontological structure of care, primordial affectivity is inspired first and foremost by the work of Spinoza, Miran de Baine, and Michel Henry. It also refers to an organism’s capacity to enact *sense making* (meaningfulness) in its environment; it also refers to a domain of existence that the influential theories of emotion have failed to incorporate into their explanatory models. The consequence, according to Colombetti, is that affective science has operated (and continues to do so) from too-narrow a conception of affect. Contrasted with embodied agents who are sensitive to their surroundings, explanations of emotion that emphasize the primacy of higher-level processes in appraisal, action, and decision-making are not confirmed by the way in which emotion is experienced. As such, many traditional accounts of emotion fail to acknowledge that organisms (including humans) do not manifest autonomy in the world as *passive* or *neutral* beings. Instead, they enact autonomous behavior by *selforganizing* and *adapting* according to the demands of their surroundings, from which a meaningful relation between organism and world is engendered without the mediation of cognitive or mental acts, a necessary requirement often postulated by affective scientists in order to elicit “meaning.”

The second chapter is a testament to the breadth of Colombetti’s expertise in the area of emotion theory. She analyzes a number of influential experiments that became the standard reference points in conducting further empirical research within affective science. As such, this research continues to exert influence over contemporary approaches to emotion, in both the cognitive sciences and neurosciences. Three dominant approaches to emotion are assessed in this book; basic emotion theory (BET), psychological constructivism, and component process. The most influential, BET, is given the most attention. And although the analysis of the two remaining theories is protracted, the treatment is more than adequate. The exegesis is excellent; it does not merely recapitulate the standard objections commonly found in the literature. Rather than accepting the objections *prima facie*, Colombetti argues that they do not, in fact, have enough force to undermine the theories. For instance, critics of BET often reject its fundamental thesis that humans possess an intrinsic set of basic emotions (or repertoires) that transcend cultural milieu. BET critics often appeal to anthropological research that putatively offers a refutation of the possibility that there exists a universally shared set of emotions. Some cultures, the anthropological objection goes, do not exhibit or identify this universally “basic” set of emotions posited by researchers. However, Colombetti does not view this type of nominalist objection as a threat to the general premise of BET. It cannot be ruled out that empirical evidence may indeed confirm that certain emotions are ultimately experienced universally; it is plausible that some cultures do indeed experience emotion X, however, X is not recognized in a manner that is identical to the “universally” displayed expression. The physiological or linguistic markers common to most cultures may not map onto X in a different culture, but it nevertheless remains entirely plausible that individuals from different cultures experience the same emotion even though it is expressed in non-identical ways.

The real threat to BET is the identification of basic emotions themselves. Colombetti points out that the choice of emotions in early empirical research was determined arbitrarily. If this is correct, contemporary empirical research on emotions, that draws from the original BET data, subsequently generates new data based on a problematic premise, one that is unable to justify why some emotions are taken to be basic while others are not. In other words, there is no evidence to support the existence of the basic emotions espoused by BET.

The phenomenologically oriented sections of the book consider how the body figures in emotional experience. Chapter 4 is an ambitious attempt to make this relationship clear, but when compared to the success of the earlier chapters, it is not equal to the task; it fails to convincingly synthesize the enactive approach with phenomenological philosophy's approach to embodiment. One particular short-coming is the failure to address the existential phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, which emphasizes the primacy of situated, non-cognitive bodily appraisal, as one of several concurrent dimensions of embodied experience. This non-cognitive capacity, otherwise known as motor-intentionality, is the basis for embodied sense-making in a given situation (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012). Of course, that is not to suggest that the success of the argument necessarily warrants the inclusion of Merleau-Ponty's bodily consciousness. Yet in light of Colombetti's outline of bodily appraisal, an explicit reference to bodily consciousness would serve to strengthen the analysis. This is especially the case given that other contemporary theorists of embodiment and action (see Aho, 2013; Fuchs, 2009; Gallagher, 2005) stress the phenomenological importance of operative intentionality and sense-making made possible within the work of Merleau-Ponty.

A problem that continues to plague the discussion of embodiment is Colombetti's failure to explicitly highlight the experiential link between an emotional episode and the felt experience of that episode. In order to provide a richer theory of emotion, one that extends beyond the experientially narrow conception common in traditional accounts, Colombetti appeals to a phenomenologically inspired "methodology" to describe embodied experience. She also devotes significant attention to the way dynamic systems theory informs the relation between emotion and enactivism. While the details of this influence are not essential for the purposes here, it is worth noting how the dynamism of the enactive mind fits with phenomenology: "emotional forms can be identified and distinguished from one another, we can consider them 'discrete.' Yet *between* them, so to speak, the organism remains affectively engaged" [p. 77, emphasis added]. For Colombetti, "between" is the space in which moods reside temporally, and because they endure over time, she sees mood as that which "primes" us, and prepares us for one particular emotion over another according to the situational demand. She rightly points out that, from a phenomenological perspective, these moods are not moods in the colloquial sense; rather they are feeling experiences that allow us to be open to the world (Heidegger, 1927/2008; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012). This idea, she notes, is elaborated further in Ratcliffe's (2008) interesting concept of "existential feelings." These, too, endure like moods, and are disclosed as background feelings that give rise to (or open up) the possibility of intentional experience at all. But Colombetti sees primordial affectivity — sense-making activity — as something that runs deeper than moods (Heidegger) and existential feelings (Ratcliffe).

With respect to the *deep* level of primordial activity, it is not adequately stipulated how it is manifested by the body-subject. This is also the context in which Merleau-Ponty's body consciousness — in the form of operative intentionality — is salient for the analysis. Non-thematic action, he argues, is a fundamental component of conscious experience, which emerges out of an embodied constellation linking the body's kinesthetic and proprioceptive capacities that have no need for mental acts to enact bodily appraisal of a situation. On the

contrary, this mode of consciousness arises by virtue of the body's necessary relationship with the world, whereby even a simple gesture is already meaningful on the basis that sense-making occurs in a perceptual dialogue, a dyadic relationship between an embodied agent and the world. Hence, when Colombetti says that, "emotional episodes as characterized here are instantiations of such sense-making activity, where the organism self-organizes into this or that emotional form" [p. 77], it is unclear how this "form" is experienced or comes into being within a complex organism if emotional episodes run deeper than the disclosing power of operative intentionality. Thus, Colombetti fails to specify at what level of conscious this experiential form is manifested.

This leads to the last issue concerning the phenomenological analysis of emotion and mood. The absence of an explicit articulation of how "instantiations of sense-making" affect the body-subject leaves several questions: Is sense-making experienced as emotions or feelings, or something else? Colombetti does not address whether or not a conceptual or experiential distinction exists between feeling and emotion. Given that she does not use the two terms equivocally, it suggests a distinction. Also, there is no doubt that the book intends to go beyond the standard notion that feelings are the mere experience of an emotion. Gallagher and Bower have pointed to the potentially wide spectrum upon which sense-making (or affectivity) may be experienced, noting that "affect is deeply embodied even to the extent that affective phenomena may [even] be constrained by the functioning of the circulatory system" (2014, p. 234). Considering affect in general, Colombetti's analysis of the relation between bodily feelings and an emotion episode is phenomenologically murky. The unspecified experiential level of emotions is complicated given that she properly recognizes that bodily feelings need not necessarily take the body as its intentional object (Fulkerson, 2013; Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012; Ratcliffe, 2008). Feeling experience need not be identified as felt inside one's body. The question about how emotions relate to felt experiences, especially when the body is not taken as the intentional object, remains unexplored.

Colombetti instead spends time reassessing bodily action with reference to Drew Leder's (1990) influential book, *The Absent Body*. She contends that Leder's notion that the body is "absorbed" during activity is an inadequate account of the body during action. The description does not properly reflect the way in which we experience our bodies while performing a given activity. She emphasizes that the body is experienced as both conspicuous and inconspicuous; our level of bodily awareness shifts between explicit or implicit. She uses the example of professional dancers who, somewhat surprisingly, describe experiencing their body as an intentional object while they perform. However, this example, in order to be salient, would be improved upon with a phenomenology of dancing itself, if only to explore the counter-intuitive description offered by the dancer. Colombetti draws on the work of Legrand (2007), who proposes that the transparent or absent body be characterized as the *performative* body. This characterization is preferred because it is intended to reflect how the body is experienced during activity without having to become the intentional object. Importantly, I believe Colombetti rightly emphasizes that emotion is infused through bodily experience, however, she again does not say in what way it is experienced during the activity. Undoubtedly, feelings manifest themselves in the background of one's awareness, but there is a problem with the analysis: it is not stipulated how emotion and feeling relate in the context of non-thematic intentionality. Because this issue is not delineated explicitly, the discussion of bodily feelings lacks clarity concerning the way in which feelings are experienced during action. Also, even if Leder's phenomenological description of the absent body warrants a critical re-conceptualization, Colombetti's argument fails to satisfactorily illustrate why the current characterization is not adequate. Having said that, a strong phenomenological description of dancing, which

is pointed to in the text, may be a promising entry point for a more robust critique of bodily absence.

Phenomenological description is open to revision and depends on the level of description provided by the participant, which makes room for rich interpretation. Nevertheless, Colombetti's main focus with bodily "absence" is perhaps attributed to a general anxiety over the historically contested metaphysical status of the body. The absent body may seem far too "disembodied." One ought to be sensitive to this concern, for sure, but on the other hand, Dreyfus' (2002) well-known account of skillful coping addresses the role of bodily absorption during the various stages of skill development, and provides a reasonable account of the way in which the body is experientially conspicuous. Colombetti characterizes absorbed activity as an oscillation, a shift between bodily perspectives of intentionality. This, however, is not a distinction between the feeling body and the felt body. Instead, it is a common sense understanding of feeling, such that the body always features as the intentional object (felt body) of experience: one either has a bodily feeling of the inside, or else it is a feeling on the body. And despite having acknowledged the important phenomenological distinction between the feeling body and the felt body, Colombetti fails to exploit the most phenomenologically interesting perspective of the feeling body, and its relationship to emotion. This under-explored connection is a missed opportunity to add insight to the phenomenological literature of emotion.

This book should be commended for its contribution to the growing literature that is critical of the ostensible explanatory power of emotions associated with neurobiological science. Colombetti has provided a detailed analysis as to why theories of emotion are ultimately conceptually untenable if they fail to incorporate bodily experience. By emphasizing the necessary role of embodiment and affect in cognition, Colombetti demonstrates that lived-experience is infused with affective significance. The phenomenological discussion, however, fails to match the theoretical strength of the book. A lack of precise descriptions and an underdeveloped link between feeling and emotion leave something to be desired when the book is considered on the whole.

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