Phantom Rhetorics: From Pathos to Affect

Julie Dawn Nelson
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Recommended Citation
PHANTOM RHETORICS: FROM PATHOS TO AFFECT

by

Julie D. Nelson

A Dissertation Submitted in
Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in English
at
The University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee
August 2014
Despite much interest in scholarship on affect and emotion in the field of rhetoric and composition in the last several decades, scholars have not yet used this scholarship to revise or extend rhetorical understandings of pathos. In our field, pathos is still primarily conceived as a linguistic tool and is rarely theorized as more than a rhetorical appeal. This conception of pathos overlooks the varied roles of emotions in rhetorical situations (e.g., how embodied or mediated emotions persuade). I argue that extending studies of pathos to include affect theory reveals more complicated rhetorical functions of pathos. But rather than treat “affect” and “emotion” as separate concepts and phenomena (like many scholars in our field), I argue it is the relationship between affect and emotion that ought to be better theorized to complicate current understandings of pathos. After close analysis of how affect and emotion have been studied in our field, I put forth a theoretical framework for rhetorical study of affects and emotions which 1) approaches rhetoric ontologically, 2) reconnects affect to assemblage theory, and 3) defines bodies (human and nonhuman) via their capacity to affect and be affected. I apply this framework to a case study of an outbreak of mass psychogenic illness (previously called “mass hysteria”) among a group of mostly
high school girls in LeRoy, NY in 2011. I begin my analysis of this case by looking for the affects and emotions at its center. Looking for *pathos* beyond the texts and discourses surrounding the case, this project examines the rhetoricity of bodies, bodily processes, assemblages, and media. This project seeks to broaden current understandings of *pathos*, to illustrate what it might look like to study *pathos* as the core of rhetorical studies.
For my parents,

who never lost faith.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Rhetorics of Emotion ................................................................. 1

Chapter 1: *Pathos* Reconsidered ................................................................. 24

Chapter 2: Rhetorical Affects: Invoking Affect Theory in Rhetorical Studies ...... 54

Chapter 3: Persuasive Bodies, Phantom Rhetorics: A Theoretical Framework .... 89

Chapter 4: A Rhetorical Analysis of Mass Hysteria ........................................... 124

Postscript: Toward A Revised Theory of *Pathos* ............................................. 151

Works Cited ....................................................................................................... 158

Vita ...................................................................................................................... 176
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks must go first and foremost to Dennis Lynch, who believed in this project even when I didn’t. D, you gave me direction when I was lost, inspired enthusiasm when I had none, and made me laugh when I needed it most. Your questions and our conversations propelled this project from beginning to end. This project also would not have begun without Alice Gillam who introduced me to feminist rhetoric and theories of emotion as a first-semester PhD student. Alice, thank you for your generous and thorough feedback on my writing; as a teacher, I aspire to have your rigor and grace. More than anyone, Anne Wysocki has nurtured my love for words. Thank you, Anne, for encouraging me to express the inexpressible, to take risks, and to write beautifully. I also want to thank Byron Hawk whose RSA workshop inspired the theoretical basis for much of this project and Lane Hall for eagerly stepping on my committee in the eleventh hour.

Many thanks must go to my dear friends in the UWM English Department, especially Dan Brown, Jennifer Kontny, Jessica Nastal, and Kara van de Graaf. Thank you for your support, advice, and humor over the years. And to my longtime friends, Matt Broughton, Ashley Gulden, Britt Pennington, and Chelsea Stripe, who helped me through the most difficult times, “thanks” is not enough. I couldn’t have done this without you. Finally, I must thank Oliver who literally sat by my side (if not in my lap) through the duration of this project. Boo Boo, you always know how to make me smile.
INTRODUCTION

Rhetorics of Emotion

In October 2011, a high school cheerleader in upstate New York woke up from a nap with a stutter. Before long, Thera Sanchez’s stutter escalated into Tourette-like symptoms; twitches, jerks, and vocal outbursts became so disruptive that Thera had to stop going to school. In the following weeks, eleven more girls at LeRoy High School presented similar symptoms, and parents became frantic as the school district rushed to determine the cause of the illness. The New York State Department of Health began an investigation but concluded no environmental or infectious causes could be found. By the spring of 2012, twenty-four people\(^1\) in the area had developed the same debilitating symptoms, and the national news media began reporting on the case, calling it a “mystery illness.” Several of the girls appeared on the Today Show, CNN, and Dr. Drew. Through stutters, jerks, and snorts, the girls plead for answers to their “mystery” symptoms.

\(^1\) Reports suggested the final count of afflicted people may have even been higher. In addition to the high school girls in LeRoy, several other people reported symptoms in the neighboring Town Cornith, NY, including a 36-year-old woman and boy.
Shortly after the case gained national attention, several experts and physicians came forward to claim the illness was not mysterious at all. It was a case of mass hysteria. Despite centuries of documented cases, outbreaks of mass hysteria continue to transfix us.\(^2\) In part, this is likely because mass hysteria is a diagnosis of exclusion. Such diagnoses are made only when all other potential causes are ruled out since symptoms vary from case to case. But it also seems to be the nature of the illness—it is psychologically rooted, manifests physically, and yet arises and is transmitted among a group people—that makes it such a compelling site for analysis.

Public and media response to this story was, not surprisingly, great. Healthy girls, with bright futures, were stricken suddenly with a debilitating syndrome—girls who seem like they could easily be our daughters, sisters, or friends. And the inability to identify a more tangible cause for the outbreak only intensified the reaction. There seemed to be no rational explanation: how can what seems to be a psychological disorder be contagious? Susan Sontag’s words in *Illness and Metaphor* ring true: “Any disease that is treated as a mystery and acutely enough feared will be felt to be morally, if not literally contagious” (6). Not only did it appear that the disease was actually contagious as more girls developed symptoms, but the moral mythology of this particular disorder took its toll. We tend to think of hysteria as an excess of emotion—a crazed and

\(^2\) New cases of mass hysteria are reported monthly. Some of the most recent publicized cases include over 300 students in Portuguese schools who suffered symptoms of rashes, difficulty breathing, and dizziness (2006); female students at a Catholic School in Mexico City who had difficulty walking, fever, and nausea (2007); and students at an all-girls school in Brunei who suffered from screaming, crying, and shaking (2010).
uncontrollable outpouring of feeling. While the sole hysterical woman doesn’t pose much of a threat to society at large, an episode of “mass hysteria” seems to. Groups of girls, in themselves, often evoke fear; we hear stories of pregnancy pacts, social bulimia, and cutting parties—similar to masochistic behavior depicted in Hollywood portrayals like The Virgin Suicides. Rather than read these incidents as narratives of self-loathing, depression, or peer pressure, incidents like these are often read as unpredictable examples of girlhood irrationality. Fear of contagion, but also what this event says about girlhood, “the world today,” and “this generation” dominated stories about the LeRoy girls.

Learning one’s diagnosis, Sontag suggests, can be “demoralizing.” Several of the girls and their families publicly rejected hysteria as a diagnosis and embraced alternative theories. Anti-vaccine groups suggested the HPV vaccine Gardasil was responsible; Erin Brockovich and her team insisted the outbreak was a result of a train that derailed in the ‘70s, spilling thousands of gallons of cyanide and trichloroethylene only three miles away from LeRoy High School; and one doctor publicly declared the phenomenon an outbreak of PANDAS (pediatric autoimmune neuropsychiatric disorders associated with streptococcal infections). Some internet commenters—in something of a digital witch hunt—even suggested the girls were possessed by the devil.

For several news cycles, the media was transfixed. Exposés in the New York Times and Slate delved into the girls lives, creating narratives that often embodied elements of Aristotelian tragedy: using “language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament” and arguably, “through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions” (bk. VI). As videos of the girls’ interviews
were spread around mainstream and social media, a complicated dialogue emerged as voices of experts, conspiracy theorists, family members, and TV personalities intersected. And a careful viewer could see the girls’ words and movements co-adapt with the various strands of discourse they consumed.

Rhetorically, there are a lot of interesting aspects to this case; there is much to consider about how the discourse of physicians, news media, and the girls themselves interacted to create the rhetoric surrounding this event—a rhetoric that captivated audiences, spread suspicion and fear, and kept this story relevant for several weeks. When looking specifically at the emotional and affective elements of this case, of which there are many, rhetoric scholars might first ask, what kinds of emotions and affects have been attributed to the girls? Among all of the professional and popular discourses, we might consider how the girls are variously represented and how those tropes and archetypes reflect a historical tendency to mark young women with psychological illness as hysterical or mad. We might look at the persistence of these archetypes and tropes, given the advent of youtube, where girls posted videos of themselves and where the public could easily follow, interpret, annotate, and diagnose the text/performance/mediation publicly. An even more critically-minded rhetorician might consider the politics of this event: who benefits from particular representations of the girls and why? How do particular kinds of media propagate various views and what rhetorical devices do they draw on to convince audiences? And to what ends?

Still, another question remains, one that is less frequently pursued in rhetorical study: not where is the rhetoric located (in this case, of mediated mass
hysteria) and what does it do, but how is it transmitted and circulated? The latter question is of particular interest to those studying affect and emotion, and it is one of the main questions that is pursued in the following chapters. Put otherwise, pathos plays a clear role in the rhetoric of this event; it was central in portraying the girls, depicting the illness, and in capturing the attention of the viewing public. But are current conceptions of pathos complicated enough to untangle and capture affect and emotion’s roles in this event?

This dissertation takes up this question carefully and, in short, I suggest the answer is no. Despite an increased interest in affect and emotion scholarship in the field, these new advances haven’t been used to reshape the concept pathos; pathos is still conceptualized in terms of discrete rhetorical situations made up of autonomous rhetors and audiences. But the event in LeRoy is made up of many rhetors, audiences, and other environmental, material, and mediated influences. It doesn’t have a clear, linear progression. The origins and purposes of the affects and emotions in the event are often ambiguous, and some “emotions” even seem to be operating separately from human intervention. Take for example, the pervasive fear that surrounds this event. There is no single, clear object that inspires fear nor is there one source of fear; rather it emerges from places like news media scare tactics, the cultural mythology surrounding hysteria, the fear of contagion, fear of the unknown, wild conspiracy theories, the girls; interviews, the school board’s lack of answers, etc.

The movement of fear is similarly dispersed among many constituents in the event; the rhetorical direction, purpose, and effect of fear can’t be easily determined. This pervasiveness of emotion, I assert, is better captured through
Joint theories of affect and emotion which emphasize how emotions and situations overlap, are recursive, and malleable. As an addition to studies of emotion in the field, affect theory better addresses how people and things gather together to create what we understand to be a rhetorical event. Affect theory, I suggest, supplements emotion theory to expand current notions of *pathos*—not just expanding our understanding of how *pathos* works but also helping us figure out how we, as rhetoricians, might more productively intervene in complex rhetorical events like the one in LeRoy.

Studying a complex event like this rhetorically means expanding our understanding of rhetorical situations (or objects of study), not only outward (as scholars like Jenny Edbauer Rice, Thomas Rickert, and Byron Hawk have suggested) to include environments, objects, and matter, but also to extend our understanding backward and forward temporally, to account for the unfolding of an event whose beginning and end may extend years beyond its “center.” The LeRoy outbreak doesn’t end once the news media goes quiet, just as it didn’t begin with the first news story. While public interest in the story has waned, there remains much to consider in this case, as several scholars from other disciplines have begun to explore (e.g., neurologist Thomas Pollak’s (2013) critique of how psychogenic movement disorder was diagnosed in LeRoy; anthropologist Ryan Cook’s (2013) ethnographic study of the case; or historian Robert Bartholomew and psychologists Simon Wessely and G James Rubin’s (2012) analysis of the role social media played in transmitting symptoms).

What I’m suggesting, then, is that rhetorically we might shift our focus from studying the discourse external to the cause and medium of the outbreak
itself to studying the affects and emotions at its center; to consider the rhetorical event not just in the aftermath of this psychological phenomenon but as beginning years before the first tic; and to see the girls not as victims of a convergence of psychological, social, and physical variables—and then the sometimes-cruel exploitation of their experience—but to see them as rhetorical agents (drawing on recent reconfigurations of agency, e.g. by Jane Bennett and Marilyn Cooper). While I’m not suggesting that the girls consciously chose to develop the illness, they weren’t randomly afflicted. An article from Slate even hints at the girls’ agency: “Some scholars have also argued that hysterical episodes allow women to take a break from daily drudgeries, or to rage against patriarchal cultures within the safe bounds of demon possession or poisoning. If girls can find no outlet for reckless abandon, in other words, they’ll create one.” Though these claims are sweeping, they also suggest we might see the girls’ tics as (rhetorically) purposeful, in a sense, just as we might see their bodies as unique, central sites of inquiry.

Of course, bodies and embodied rhetorics aren’t new to rhetorical studies. Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley’s 1999 collection Rhetorical Bodies marked a heightened rhetorical interest in bodies and materiality, yet therein bodies are often considered only as points of origin and articulations of positionality. In the “Afterword,” Crowley asserts that one of the most important things about body theories is that they highlight “the interestedness of boundary-drawing and distinction-making” (363). This is useful in showing that some one profits when distinctions and boundaries are made; she asserts, “no body is disinterested” (363). While this is certainly true, considering bodies primarily in terms of their
positionality (as they wear culturally constructed significations like race, class, and gender) prohibits us from thinking of bodies as always moving and changing, as Brian Massumi has argued. To accept bodies as the static point of origin for rhetoric, rather than seeing bodies as co-adapting along with environments, movements, and feelings, is to accept a narrow view of bodies. More recently, Debra Hawhee has echoed this concern in *Moving Bodies*:

> The bind for body theorists is that bodies become a problem when they come to ‘stand in’ for subject positions . . . Contemporary theory thus has a tendency to freeze bodies, to analyze them for their symbolic properties, thereby evacuating and ignoring their capacity to sense and to move through time. (7)

The frozen body is particularly problematic for studies of *pathos*, which for too long have considered “the body” to be its container—literally and figuratively containing emotion. In this formulation, emotion either originates within the body, becomes the impetus for rhetoric, and moves outward, or someone else’s emotion is taken into the body through rhetorical means.

No doubt a study of bodies will run up against what Hawhee calls “the limits of humanistic approaches to the body,” yet I, like she and others, see pushing those limits as a rhetorically useful exercise (7). If we restrict our

---

3 We can also see this sentiment in debates about agency, from, for example Marilyn Cooper (2011) who writes, “I suggest that neither conscious intention nor free will—at least as we commonly think of them—is involved in acting or bringing about change” (421), and in debates about the rhetorical situation, from, for example, Jenny Edbauer Rice (2005): “Rather than primarily speaking of rhetoric through the terministic lens of conglomerated elements, I look towards a framework of affective ecologies that recontextualizes rhetorics in their temporal, historical, and lived fluxes” (9).
understandings of what is rhetorical to the verbal and written discourse surrounding an event, we risk seeing bodies as static texts or as emotion’s point of origin; we fail to see how bodies’ movements and affects could be considered rhetorical and how more traditional forms of discourse are consumed by and reflected in bodies. To see bodies as generative rhetorical sites rather than static texts and/or social positions is important for understanding how rhetoric manifests and moves. These considerations are necessary for revising a theory of \textit{pathos}.

A Note on Terminology

Already in this chapter, I’ve used a range of terminology to describe the sensory, embodied, visceral, and noncognitve aspects or dimensions of rhetoric. My choice to use and move among three terms—\textit{pathos}, emotion, and affect—might be puzzling. However, this choice doesn’t mean I’m using them interchangeably or without concern for their differences and how they’ve been used in the past, commonly, and by other rhetoricians. Rather it is precisely these differences, I suggest, that allow us to study—to dig deeper into—complex rhetorical studies. In other words, this dissertation relies on harnessing the differences and possible relationships between these terms to suggest a theoretical framework for a revised approach of \textit{pathos}—an approach that doesn’t just take \textit{pathos} into account but puts it at the center of any investigation into complex rhetorical objects of study.
The main task of this dissertation—drawing out a more complicated theory of pathos—requires a close examination of how emotion and affect scholarship in other fields has been received and used to various ends in our field. Ultimately, I want to present pathos as an umbrella term that both emotion and affect inform—for rhetorical purposes. While emotion scholarship already fits under that umbrella in many ways (advances in cognitive and social approaches to emotion, for example, mostly align with how pathos has been traditionally understood), scholars often place affect scholarship purposefully outside of that umbrella. This is because pathos is generally understood to be an appeal the human rhetor uses, and affect is generally understood as being external to human control—and often even external to human (re)cognition. Both of these assumptions are precisely what I hope to trouble.

Definitions of “affect” and “emotion” are plentiful inside and outside our field. In the pages that follow, I’m not interested in privileging one over the other as much as considering what various definitions may offer rhetorical studies. When I use the terms “affect” and “emotion,” I’ll be referring primarily to particular theories of each concept (e.g. cognitive-evaluative and social constructionist approaches to emotion, and affective theories inspired by Massumi, Jameson, and Lacan).

My definition of pathos is, of course, more important for the work that follows. I understand pathos, first and foremost, as a rhetorical term. When I use “pathos,” I’m referring to the rhetorical concept that has traditionally been understood as an appeal to emotion, the third intrinsic proof (alongside ethos and logos). I see pathos as intimately tied to practical reasoning and public
deliberation, reflecting Edward Corbett and Rosa Ebberly’s (2000) claim that
pathos is the “emotional impact of reasoning or argument on the listener reader” (72). But I also recognize the sometimes-intangible power of pathos, echoing sentiments like Cicero’s: “the two principal qualities required in an orator, are to be neat and clear in stating the nature of his subject, and warm and forcible in moving the passions; and as he who fires and inflames his audience, will always effect more than he who can barely inform and amuse them” (Brutus 89). To inflame the minds of an audience, to dwell in pathos, the rhetorical tradition suggests, a rhetor interprets the emotional state or disposition of an audience and then inspires emotions or emotional patterns that turn the audience in whatever direction the case demands. Because emotions have objects, following Aristotle’s approach, a savvy rhetor can alter the temporal and spatial proximity to those objects and change an emotion’s intensity within the audience’s ongoing reactions to a discourse or text. The ethical responsibilities of invoking pathos are also important to note, since use of pathos is always attached to a rhetorical purpose, which ideally contributes to community and civic wellbeing. In this regard, it is good to remember the close etymological relations among ethos, ethics, and dwelling and their inseparable relations to feeling.  

Traditionally, pathos has been associated with the emotions—not affects. When I use “pathos” in the first two chapters of this dissertation, I’m using it as it has been conventionally understood. In the final two chapters, wherein I attempt to revise a concept of pathos, I suggest we can also identify affects (variously

---

4 This is emphasized in Martha Nussbaum’s work on emotion and ethics, which I discuss briefly in Chapter One.
defined as bodily intensity, becomings, the aesthetic feeling of an era, identifications, exigences, and constraints) in rhetorical situations. It’s important to note that I don’t see the realm of affect as beyond the scope of emotion or as “logically” independent of emotion (as Massumi seems to suggest); this realm simply hasn’t been pursued extensively within the framework of emotion studies nor have the respective terminologies of affect and emotion been explored in proximity. Affect scholarship, taken as a whole, captures some aspects of experience that haven’t yet been explored in emotion scholarship but not because of something inherent in either concept, or so I will argue.

Two other terms—rhetorical situation and rhetorical event—will be used in this dissertation to discuss how pathos has been traditionally theorized and to name and study the outbreak of mass hysteria in LeRoy. When I write about the “rhetorical situation,” I am using it as Lloyd Bitzer has defined it (as structured by exigence, audience, and constraint); I use this understanding as an example of a common or traditional way that the rhetorical situation has been defined in the field. I recognize that there have been many critiques of Bitzer’s theory; some have suggested that Bitzer has a too realist worldview (that his theory seems to capture an essential structure in real-world interactions rather than being an analytic tool) and others have suggested the spatiality and temporality of the situation he defined is too limiting. In order to acknowledge these critiques without abandoning what is structurally useful about Bitzer’s rhetorical situation,

---

5 Richard Vatz’s “The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation” is, of course, the most famous critique of Bitzer, but scholars like Barbara Biesecker in “Rethinking the Rhetorical Situation from within the Thematic of Difference” and Jenny Edbauer Rice in “Unframing Models of Public Distibution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies” have also addressed the limitations of Bitzer’s theory.
I use the provisional term, “rhetorical event,” when discussing my case study. While “situation” has often been understood to mark a discrete, isolated period of time, “event” seems, to me, to be more spatially and temporally expansive. It may also allow me to keep some of the structural coherence of Bitzer's situation, while at the same time attending to the ways in which situations layer and overlap.

The Pathetic Tradition, in Brief

*Pathos* has always been at the core of rhetoric. In classical rhetoric, *pathos* or the passions are portrayed both in Plato’s chariot allegory as the dark horse which “has a share of badness is heavy, sinking toward the earth and weighing down the charioteer by whom he has been not beautifully reared” (*Phaedrus* 247b) and in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* as intimately tied to persuasion: “The emotions are all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgments, and that are also attended by pain or pleasure” (*bk II, ch. 1, 1378a*). Even though Aristotle’s approach to *pathos*—based on a tripartite logic7 to analyze the structure of emotions—brought emotion within the sphere of enthymemic reasoning, the passions still were more often described as out of our control: passion is described throughout *The Republic*, for example, as “intoxicating,” “lawless,” and

---

6 Given the brevity of this introduction, I’m admittedly skipping over many important historical influences that inform current understandings of emotion, including Christianity, Descartes, psychoanalysis, faculty psychology, etc. For a brief historical overview, see “The “History of Emotion’ and the Future of Emotion Research” by Anna Wierzbicka.

7 Aristotle describes how he will analyze each emotion in Book II: “In regard to each emotion we must consider (a) the states of mind in which it is felt; (b) the people towards whom it is felt; (c) the grounds on which it is felt” (*bk. II, ch 1, 1378a*).
“slavish” (bk. IX). Or in contrast to Aristotle’s suggestion that we make use of emotions rhetorically, Gorgias highlights the more sinister role emotions play in rhetoric: “For just as different drugs dispel different secretions from the body, and some bring an end to disease and others to life, so also in the case of speeches, some distress, others delight, some cause fear, others make the hearers bold, and some drug and bewitch the soul with a kind of evil persuasion” (Ecomium 42). Here, Gorgias compares the effects of speech to the effects of drugs on a body, suggesting the emotions (distress, delight, fear) are what “bewitch” us. Logic, it seems, doesn’t enrapture our bodies and minds in the same way.

Speed forward two millennia and scholars continue to rely on classical understandings of pathos, though developing them in accord with the mission of the “new rhetorics.” Kenneth Burke’s theory of identification, for example, in which “you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his” has clear affective implications (Motives 55). To identify with someone in this way acknowledges the emotional dimension and embodied nature of lived experience, but it also points to something more, something recent theories call “affective investment.” Similarly, Edward Corbett (1969) noted the increased focus on—but also the risk of—a rhetoric that privileges pathos. He makes a clear distinction (using the metaphor of a hand) between traditional and “new” kinds of rhetorics:

The open hand might be said to characterize the kind of persuasive discourse that seeks to carry its point by reasoned, sustained, conciliatory discussion of the issues. The closed fist might signify
the kind of persuasive activity that seeks to carry its point by non-rationale, non-sequential, often non-verbal, frequently provocative means. ("Rhetoric" 288)

The closed fist (perhaps a contemporary dark horse in Plato’s chariot allegory), he suggests, attends to the emotional dimension, yet there is an element of volatility that makes the closed fist seem more than just emotional; it is provocative, if not untamed.

In the last few decades, we’ve seen a surge of scholarship on emotion in our field. Some of the earliest works on emotion in rhetoric and composition emerged in the late ‘80s from Susan McLeod (1987, 1995) and Alice Brand (1989, 1990). Their work focused primarily on the emotions that writers feel before and during the act of composing; they suggested that if we could examine expert writers’ emotions, we might be able to help our students compose better, more efficiently, or even find a cure for writer’s block. Two important collections for this area of scholarship were published during this time: Presence of Mind: Writing and the Domain Beyond the Cognitive (1994) edited by Alice Glarden Brand and Richard Graves and The Spiritual Side of Writing: Releasing the Learner’s Whole Potential (1997), edited by Regina Paxton Foehr and Susan Schduring. These early works on emotion have clear expressivist undertones; they suggest that writers might be more successful and produce more “authentic” writing if they can tap into their emotions for inspiration. These works tend to consider emotions as personal, internal forces.

Not surprising, given composition’s social turn in the following decade, work on emotion became more concerned with the social construction and
political stakes of experiencing and expressing emotion in the contexts of reading and writing. Lynn Worsham (1998) and T.R. Johnson (2001) are among those who consider how we are schooled in emotion and its political implications; they see emotion as embedded in our social and educational structures and dispositions. These considerations are taken up additionally by scholars who have examined the emotional labor of writing program administration and the emotional effects of disciplinary marginalization (see Micciche and Jacob’s 2003 collection, *A Way to Move: Rhetorics of Emotion & Composition Studies*). More recently, scholars like Micciche (2007) and Edbauer Rice (2005) have applied emotion and affect scholarship from across the humanities and social sciences to our field, suggesting emotions and affects exist between people, in language, and in our bodies. While the late ’90s and early ’00s saw an increased interest in emotion studies, it seemed to wane when scholars’ attention turned to studies of affect. In the last decade, the great influx in affect scholarship in our field would seem to suggest that affect theories offer the field something emotion theories don’t. I’ll suggest, however, that the influx of “affect” and waning of “emotion” reflects less about the usefulness of each concept and more about how each concept has been brought into, used, and theorized in our field.

The main theoretical move that has contributed to the decline in emotion scholarship is the conceptual divorcing of affect from emotion. Many scholars attribute this move to this oft-cited distinction from Brian Massumi:
Affect is most often used loosely as a synonym for emotion. But one of the clearest lessons of this first story\(^8\) is that emotion and affect—if affect is intensity—follow different logics and pertain to different orders . . . Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. \((Parables\ 27-8)\).

Since affect is most closely defined as intensity, emotion is affect tamed and named. The distinction Massumi makes between affect and emotion, which many scholars in the field have held onto so very tightly, keeps us from developing more complicated notions of pathos. When scholars accept Massumi’s distinction as fixed, they often see no need to consider emotion at all, since emotion is “qualified,” “conventional,” or “captured.” Given its long pathetic tradition, rhetoric is already primed for participating in the affective turn,\(^9\) yet rather than using affect theory to extend theories of pathos, most scholars seem to have abandoned emotion for affect.

However, exploring the distinction between affect and emotion, what exists between feeling and articulation, is of great interest to rhetoric as we pursue nonrational and nonlinguistic forms of persuasion and communication. As Michael Hardt explains in the Forward to \textit{The Affective Turn},

---

\(^8\) Here Massumi is referencing the first case study in his book, which I will discuss in detail in Chapter Two.

\(^9\) The “affective turn” was coined by Patricia Clough in her 2007 collection of the same name.
The perspective of the affects requires us to constantly pose as a problem the relation between actions and passions, between reason and the emotions. We do not know in advance what a body can do, what a mind can think—what affects they are capable of. The perspective of the affects requires an exploration of these as yet known powers. (x)

From the perspective of the affects, we can see how pathos in the LeRoy case is not to be found just in the language of mystery and contagion, in the scare tactics used to engage audiences, in bating interview questions, or in the discourse among experts and the girls’ families. We are similarly persuaded emotionally by bodies fighting to control themselves, whose symptoms mimic and evolve together. Beyond language, beyond discourse, and yet interwoven within them, we’re persuaded emotionally through the bodies in this event. This dissertation—through examination and critique of how emotion and affect have been studied in the field—offers a framework for studying pathos that acknowledges emotion’s and affect’s work within and beyond the rhetorical appeal.

Chapter Overview

Despite many scholars in rhetoric and composition who have embraced the resurgence of emotion studies in the last few decades, pathos is still primarily theorized as a rhetorical appeal. This formulation is useful only for studying rhetorical situations with discrete borders, beginnings and endings—not the rhetoricity of an event like the one in LeRoy wherein pathos plays many roles.
Chapter One, “Pathos Reconsidered,” begins by looking at two of the major advances in studies of emotion in the last few decades—cognitive-evaluative and social constructionist approaches to emotion—and examines how these advances have been received in our field.

These approaches have been taken up in two primary ways: rereading Aristotle’s concept of *pathos* and creating pedagogies that call our attention to or invoke emotions. I suggest that while the practice of rereading (which often brings cognitive and social approaches to emotion to bear) has brought our attention to often-overlooked areas of Aristotle’s theory, this scholarship hasn’t yet considered what it would mean to use this more nuanced understanding of *pathos* in practice. Through a look at two examples of pedagogies of emotion from Laura Micciche and Megan Boler, I illustrate the difficulties of reconciling cognitive and social approaches to emotion. Micciche and Boler incite particular emotions (empathy and discomfort) in their students, but the structural logics of these particular emotions seem unequipped to meet the goals of their pedagogies—to create more critical readers and writers. Finally, I’ll suggest that a revised theory of *pathos* also requires reconsidering the rhetorical situation. Emotion is often considered to be the cause and effect of a rhetorical situation, yet as advances in emotion studies detailed in this chapter suggest, emotions play more varied roles (cognitively and socially) in persuading us. I end this chapter by suggesting affect theory allows us to imagine more complicated understandings of *pathos*, in which emotions and affects are organizing rhetorical forces.
Chapter Two, “Rhetorical Affects: Invoking Affect Theory in Rhetorical Studies,” examines how scholars in our field have primarily understood and used affect theory. I begin by considering the wave of affect theory that has seemed to overtake studies of emotion, and I look more closely at the conceptual distinction between affect and emotion in our field. Through a close reading of Massumi’s definitions of affect and emotion, I suggest that it’s the very relationship between the two concepts that Massumi and we might be more interested in. Because Massumi’s theory of affect focuses on bodily intensity—a force that cannot be captured in language—it often seems to describe a phenomenon that exists beyond the scope of rhetorical study; thus, I suggest we also consider other theories of affect that might be more easily integrated in our field. Fredric Jameson’s theory of affect (which describes the affects embedded in the postmodern era) highlights how we can see affects as recursive in a rhetorical situation, complicating traditional conceptions of rhetorical situations. Finally, because neither Massumi’s nor Jameson’s theories of affect deal with the individual’s affective experience, I turn to Jacques Lacan’s concept of desire (which is closely related to affect) to give insight into why and how individuals become affectively invested in groups, things, and events. To set up the work of the following chapter, I suggest that a revised theory of pathos should also consider the role affects and emotions play in defining projects, sustaining rhetorical events, and in applying rhetorical theories to studies of objects and events that might not always have been considered rhetorical.

Chapter Three, “Persuasive Bodies, Phantom Rhetorics: A Theoretical Framework,” begins with a look at theories of phantom limbs to reveal several
ways of theorizing bodies that prohibit their study, for example making finite
distinctions between what is and is not of a body, clinging to an idea of a whole
body, and defining bodies by what is visibly present. I suggest we resist theorizing
affect and matter as antithetical (in other words, accepting that matter is seen,
touched, and used, and that affect is not). This chapter puts forth a framework to
better study affect, by 1) approaching rhetoric ontologically, 2) reconnecting
affect to assemblage theory, and 3) defining bodies (human and nonhuman) via
their capacity to affect and be affected. In order to study something like an
outbreak of mass hysteria, we have to figure out first what to study. Taking an
ontological approach (and specifically invoking John Law and Vicky Singleton’s
theory of “fire object”) allows us to identify how mass hysteria’s multiple objects
have different (and sometimes conflicting) rhetorical aims and effects, in addition
to different emotional and affective influences. To address a common complaint
in our field—that we can’t ascertain what affect does rhetorically—I argue that
revisiting Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s assemblage theory (specifically
looking at the concepts “double articulation” and “territorialization”) makes
affect rhetorically visible and purposeful, highlighting that affect assembles
rhetoric, bodies, objects, etc. Finally, I argue that Spinoza’s theory of bodies can
help us see affect as transitive and not representational; affect is captured in a
body’s movement from one state to another, correlated with an increase or
decrease in a body’s (rhetorical) power to act.

The final chapter, “A Rhetorical Analysis of Mass Hysteria,” applies the
theoretical framework put forth in the previous chapter to the LeRoy case. I begin
by describing what makes this case a particularly unique incident of mass
hysteria. In addition to the news media playing a large role in contributing to the diagnosing of the girls and in shaping the narrative on a national scale, social media (specifically Facebook and YouTube) became central sites for both the transmission of symptoms but also for the girls’ attempts to take control of their own story. Following much of the scholarship that is the basis for this dissertation, I explain my methodology for the analysis of the case is somewhat unorthodox. Rather than focusing my analysis solely on the central texts of the case (e.g., the New York State Department of Health’s report and news media coverage), I use these texts (in conjunction with historical and medical scholarship on hysteria and the very recent scholarship on the case) to identify places in the development of this event that are particularly interesting for a rhetorical analysis of affect and emotion. Through an application of the framework put forth in Chapter Three, I conclude that 1) the way we choose and define complex rhetorical projects has emotional and affective repercussions, 2) assemblage theory helps us understand how particular parts of the event that might have seemed external are subsumed in it, and 3) an understanding of affect that grows out of Spinoza, Deleuze, and Guattari places affect at the very core of rhetoric and what is rhetorically possible. Through this configuration, we can imagine pathos as the very basis for what is rhetorically possible, as discourses and bodies come into being through their affects. This framework reveals pathos as an entry point into studying complex rhetorical events and asks us to construct different kinds of rhetorical projects that might consider, for example, a tic, verbal outburst, or illness as rhetorical.
I end with a Postscript that briefly summarizes what I consider to be the main tenets of a revised theory of *pathos*. I suggest this would involve 1) accepting affect and emotion as intimately related, 2) acknowledging and making rhetorical use of the varying theoretical approaches to affect and emotion, and 3) seeking out the study of rhetorical objects that are malleable, mediated, qne bodily, in order to better capture the central roles of affect and emotion in rhetoric. Finally, I offer three openings that might be pursued in future research, including 1) the ethical implications of a revised theory of *pathos*, 2) further analyses of psychoanalytic theories of affect, and 3) more serious studies of bodily processes as rhetorical.
Chapter One

Pathos Reconsidered

I suspect in fact that one of the reasons so much research on the emotions has appeared in the academy over the last twenty years is that it has served as compensation for the anesthetization of the emotions in academic life, a profession saturated with stringent rules of emotionless rationality in relation to research itself and to writing.

–Kathleen Woodward, Statistical Panic

There is nothing reprehensible about being moved to action through our emotions; in fact it is perfectly normal.

–Edward Corbett, Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student

There’s no doubt that studies of emotion and affect have become more pervasive in the humanities and social sciences in recent decades. The first epigraph to this chapter reminds us that the turn to emotion and affect isn’t an accident; given our particular historical, cultural, and academic positionings, studies of emotion have become more relevant, perhaps even necessary. Yet the second epigraph reminds us that even though theories of emotion have been greatly complicated in recent years, it wasn’t that long ago that persuasion via
emotion could be considered “reprehensible.” It wasn’t that long ago that emotional appeals were treated as suspect, as appealing to something “lower” in our nature.

While Corbett highlights the lingering mistrust of emotions, Woodward echoes a theme that resonates especially in rhetoric and composition—where many scholars (e.g., Susan Miller (1992); Eileen Schell (2006); Kathleen Welch (2003); Janine Rider and Esther Broughton (2004)) have written about the physical and emotional marginalization of our discipline. These scholars draw on rhetoric and composition’s history and struggle to become recognized as a discipline and touch on the lingering emotional effects of working in English departments or across campuses with academics who might still see rhetoric and composition as concerned more with service than serious scholarly pursuits. This marginalization has not just material repercussions (as academics fight for resources) but also emotional repercussions if rhetoric and composition scholars feel they need to prove their legitimacy.

Focusing more on the emotional work in our classrooms, scholars like Lynn Worsham (1998), T.R. Johnson (2001), and Thomas Rickert (2007) have called our attention to how contemporary culture and media shape our work as composition teachers. Suggesting that the emotional experiences of learning and writing are fundamentally different given technological advances and the

---

10 For scholarship on the emotional labor of writing program administration see Tom Kerr’s, Alice Gillam’s, and Mara Holt, Leon Anderson, and Alber Rouzie’s essays in A Way to Move: Rhetorics of Emotion and Composition Studies, eds. Laura Micciche and Dale Jacobs. See also Chris Drew et al.’s “Affect, Labor, and the Graduate Teaching Assistant: Can Writing Programs Become ‘Spaces of Hope’?” for considerations of the emotional labor of graduate students.
seeming influx of violence in educational settings, these scholars suggest we find better ways to help students learn and write in settings that might be more emotionally complicated (student emotions ranging from complete apathy to rage) than in previous generations. The fact that so many scholars have been interested in examining the emotions attached to our disciplinary and pedagogical work suggests that attention to emotion helps us better investigate a number of overlooked areas in our field.

Given the influx in scholarship on affect and emotion in the humanities and social sciences, we might expect rhetorical theories of *pathos* to be greatly expanded in recent years. We might expect that scholars would use the studies of emotion in neuroscience, psychology, anthropology, etc. to reform a theory of *pathos*, but this has not yet been the case. While scholars in our field have used this burgeoning area of scholarship to reread canonical texts and to consider more carefully how emotion plays into our teaching (for students and teachers), they don’t easily translate into, or in aggregate compose, a theory of *pathos* that would provide clues for how we can better read and move an audience emotionally. This scholarship informs a more nuanced understanding of the nature of emotions but is usually discussed separately from theories of *pathos*.

This chapter begins by explicating the two major movements in retheorizing emotion in the last several decades (cognitive-evaluative and social-constructionist approaches to emotion) and then considers how they’ve been received in the field. Through a look at examples of rereading the concept *pathos*, I’ll suggest that scholars have used advances in emotion scholarship primarily to bolster—extend somewhat but certainly not transform—existing theories of
Then I’ll draw out some of the difficulties of reconciling cognitive and social theories in practice by looking at pedagogies of emotion. I’ll end this chapter by suggesting a revised theory of pathos would need to account for how pathos works in emergent, malleable rhetorical events.

Influential Emotion Scholarship

Two theoretical approaches have dominated scholarship on emotion in the humanities and social sciences in the last several decades: cognitive and social approaches. The first, influenced mostly by scholarship in psychology, philosophy and neuroscience, suggests that emotion is intelligent, rational, and intentional; it opposes an understanding of emotion as an unsophisticated, natural force. It asserts that rather than being at the mercy of emotional waves and whims, humans have the ability to recognize how emotion works practically and existentially. The second move emphasizes the cultural, political, and historical aspects of emotion. Coming from disciplines like anthropology, cultural studies, and women’s studies, this vein of scholarship emphasizes the contextuality of emotion and its relation to social position and identity. This social and cultural approach highlights the emotional structures and customs that are embedded in a particular place and time and experienced differently depending on one’s social

---

11 Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio in *Descartes’ Error*, for example, wrote extensively on emotions, claiming that feelings functioned no differently in the brain than other percepts. His main contribution was perhaps the speculative connection he formed between emotion and practical reasoning, arguing that emotions help fill in the inevitable gaps between what we know and what we would need to know to make a certain judgment or decision to permit practical judgment in an imperfectly understood world.
position and identity. Unlike cognitive theories which emphasize individuals’ reasoning and evaluative faculties (albeit in social contexts), social and cultural theories turn us outward to see how emotional pedagogies and mores are and become embedded in our culture. This section examines the major tenets of each approach as they might inform rhetorical studies.

One of the central claims of cognitive theories of emotion is that emotion is an evaluative judgment. Philosopher Robert Solomon in his seminal book *The Passions Emotions and the Meaning of Life* (1976) asserts: “An emotion is a basic judgment about our Selves and our place in our world, the projection of the values and ideals, structures and mythologies, according to which we live and through which we experience our lives” (126). Emotions, then, are a structured way of understanding our worlds, based on beliefs, judgments, and values. Rather than understanding emotions as separate from the actions and interactions we experience, emotions make sense of those experiences: “[Emotions] are not reactions but interpretations. They are not responses to what happens but evaluations of what happens. And they are not responses to those evaluative judgments but rather they are those judgments” (127). Emotion, therefore, is a “conceptual scheme,” “a worldview and a system of metaphors” (Solomon 61). Solomon goes on to explain the logic of particular emotions, analyzing their specific direction, scope, strategy, mythology, etc. (mirroring but developing Aristotle’s tripartite analysis of emotions in Book II of the *Rhetoric*). Both Solomon and Aristotle highlight that emotions have objects and occur because of certain kinds of circumstances, interactions, and power dynamics.
Extending Solomon’s theory, philosopher Martha Nussbaum in *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (2001) claims emotions are not only evaluative in nature but also emphasizes the centrally moral dimension of emotion: “Instead of viewing morality as a system of principles to be grasped by the detached intellect, and emotions as motivations that either support or subvert our choice to act according to principle, we will have to consider emotions as part and parcel of the system of ethical reasoning” (1). Nussbaum sees emotions as a call to respond ethically; they are a part of “the good life”—our conception of what it means to live well with others. This resonates especially with pathos since rhetoricians have long debated the importance of invoking emotion ethically and responsibly.

However, cognitive theories, critics\(^\text{12}\) have argued, in privileging the mental aspects of emotion, often ignore—or are too quick to dismiss—the role of bodies. Because they are responding to prominent influences like the James-Lange theory and the hydraulic model of emotion\(^\text{13}\)—which reinforce that emotion is based in bodies and more importantly, that bodies cannot be trusted—Solomon and Nussbaum emphasize that emotions are mental phenomena with direction and intention. Early bodily theories of emotion reinforce what Solomon calls “The Myth of the Passions,” wherein emotions are “animal intrusions and physiologically based disruptions,” “sporadic and ‘irrational’ intrusions,” or


\(^{13}\) For more on the James-Lange theory and the hydraulic model see Michael Hyde (1984), Matthew Ratcliffe (2005), Robert Solomon (2007). Solomon uses the “hydraulic model” to serve as a visual reminder that his opposition indulged in a too mechanical view of human existence.
“threatening or overwhelming ‘forces’” (xiv). Nussbaum similarly identifies “the adversary” to cognitive theories: “emotions are ‘non-reasoning movements,’ unthinking energies that simply push the person around” (24). If emotions are movements that can push and pull us to do things outside of rationality, bodies become the wild vehicles of emotion. Thus, in distancing themselves from The Myth of the Passions, many cognitive theories favored minds over bodies—resulting in what some critics have called an inverse validation of the Cartesian binary.

The claim that made cognitive approaches resonate with so many scholars at the time—that emotion is a judgment—is also a point of contention,14 since judgment is so closely associated with mental processes. Solomon (2004), himself, nearly thirty years after he published The Passions admits that his cognitive theory “veered too far in the other direction,” overlooking the role of bodies (85). He suggests that “judgment” is often misunderstood as “overly detached and intellectual” but that he’s always recognized that judgments are bodily. Instead he claims, “‘Judgment’ is less than adequate not because it is too detached or cerebral but because it fails to make fully explicit our active engagement in the world” (83). Thus, Solomon focuses his later cognitive theory of emotion on highlighting how our (emotional) judgments have a recursive relationship with our surroundings, such that they interpret but also influence the world around us.

14 David Weberman (1996) for example has called Solomon’s cognitive view of emotion “subjectivist” because it’s concerned mostly with the individual subject’s world, holding that all perceived things are shaped by our subjectivity.
Similarly, “judgment” also seems to imply, perhaps inaccurately, conscious awareness and intentionality. Because of this association, Ronald De Sousa (1987) suggests that the cognitive view of emotion is best understood as a model of perception rather than a model of knowledge or judgment: “an emotion can genuinely affect not just behavior but even our whole orientation to the world and the events of our lives, without the subject having any particular insight into either the identity of the emotion or the nature of its influence” (64). The problem with accepting emotions as judgments is that we often translate that to mean we are fully aware of the emotions we have; accepting emotions as perceptions, though, highlights how emotions are a way of understanding the world around us without committing us to a too-cognitive, or mentalistic, approach. We can never hold all of the emotions that shape us in our minds at once. As both Solomon and Aristotle point out, particular emotions function in different ways; they have different objects and last for different periods of time. I feel love for my mother, but that love isn’t always the foremost emotion I experience; it is likely often overshadowed by a series of other more temporally and spatially close emotions I experience every day. My love may abide but it is always foregrounded; it isn’t reducible to a number of episodes or times when I am more aware of my love.

The second major movement in recent emotion scholarship addresses some of cognitive theories’ blind spots and focuses on the cultural, political, and historical construction of emotion. Many social theorists work against the same

---

15 For more on the history of emotion in rhetoric, see Daniel Gross’ Secret History of Emotion.
Cartesian assumptions about emotion that the cognitive theorists oppose; anthropologist Catherine Lutz, for example, in *Unnatural Emotions* rejects an “overly naturalized and rigidly bound concept of emotion”; instead she sees “emotion as an ideological practice rather than as a thing to be discovered or an essence to be distilled” (4). The Western distinction between nature and culture, Lutz suggests, in which culture is taken to be civilized and rational, contributes to the idea that emotion is natural (paradoxically, perhaps even mechanical): “emotion can be viewed as a cultural and interpersonal process of naming, justifying, and persuading by people in relationship to each other. Emotional meaning is then a social rather than an individual achievement—an emergent product of social life” (5). An individual’s emotional experience always reflects the culture in which she lives—its language for emotion and the ways she is taught to understand, feel, and express emotions, given her age, social positioning, race, sexuality, etc. In pointing to the constructedness of emotions, social theorists often suggest that we are all complicit in regulating our and others’ emotions and that paying attention to this regulation might undo some of the emotional construction that has had particularly troublesome consequences.¹⁶

Feminist scholar Sara Ahmed in *Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) builds on this approach to the emotions, suggesting that “emotions are not ‘in’ either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries

¹⁶ One poignant example is psychologists Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson’s *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys*, which details the (sometimes violent) consequences of a lack of emotional literacy in American boys. See also Catherine Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod’s collection *Language and the Politics of Emotion*. 
that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as objects” (10). Here, Ahmed recognizes the limitations of locating emotion primarily within or beyond the individual and offers instead metaphors of surface and boundary to emphasize how experiences with emotion divide and categorize individuals into social groups and cultures.

Many social theories of emotion also point out the ways in which a person’s social and cultural positioning both enable and constrain the expression of and experience with emotion. One obvious way we are positioned is through gender. In “Engendered Emotion: Gender, Power, and the Rhetoric of Emotional Control in American Discourse” (1996), Lutz contends that any discourse on emotion is ultimately a discourse on gender:

As both an analytic and an everyday concept in the West, emotion, like the female, has typically been viewed as something natural rather than cultural, irrational rather than rational, chaotic rather than ordered, subjective rather than universal, physical rather than mental or intellectual, unintended and uncontrollable, and hence often dangerous. (69)

Studies show, according to Lutz, that children as young as preschool age have learned gendered emotional stereotypes; emotion for women is especially culturally constructed, functioning to keep women subordinate and labeled as irrational (87). Because women are expected to be more emotional, they are often held responsible for the emotional lives of those who surround them. This is a common claim that feminist scholars studying emotion address; philosopher Alison Jaggar, for instance, supports Lutz’s assertion about the gender disparity
in emotional expression: “emotionally inexpressive women are suspect as not being real women” (157). Jaggar calls emotions that are incompatible with dominant values “outlaw emotions”; anger, for example, is an outlaw emotion for women, although the propensity for anger is an important component for male expressions of dominance and masculinity. Both Lutz and Jaggar, by pointing out the systemic nature of emotions, emphasize emotions as culturally embedded; we grow up in patterns of emotional expression and experience that teach us which emotions are more or less acceptable, given our identities.

Each of these approaches presents unique opportunities for theories of *pathos*. The cognitive approach suggests that a closer study of how particular emotions work could help a rhetor more easily incite them or work with them. For example, because emotions always have an object, if a rhetor wants to incite anger, she might bring the object of anger into presence through anecdotes or imagery, but if a rhetor wants to inspire forgiveness toward the object of that anger, she might try to distance her discourse from that object and instead conjure an object that inspires sympathy. Depending on the emotion, spatial and temporal distance from the object of the emotion might intensify or ameliorate it. Rhetors are often tasked with trying to either incite an emotion to inspire action in an audience or quell an emotion to appease an audience; thus, understanding the structures of emotions can be useful when a rhetor decides which emotions might be best to invoke and how to work (with) them. If emotions are structured cognitively as judgments and serve primarily evaluative purposes, opportunities emerge for rhetoricians. Studying the judgments that structure an emotion
related to its object gives rhetoricians a clearer place to start when they plan pathetic strategies and integrate them with a larger plan and purpose.

Likewise, social approaches to emotion provide the rhetor with a better idea of how social and political contexts might shape the emotions of an audience or their willingness (perhaps susceptibility) to developing other emotions. Because rhetorical situations always have cultural, contextual constraints, thinking more carefully about these constraints might offer clues about which emotions would be best to appeal to. For example, many took advantage of the emotions inspired by 9/11, perhaps most egregiously George W. Bush who used the dynamics of anger and fear to further his purpose in his national addresses. Though an extreme case, Bush’s use of pathos,\textsuperscript{17} combined with an understanding of the emotions that dominated American culture at that time, was arguably effective. Similarly, following social theorists who assert our emotions are tied up in our cultural identities and affiliations, a rhetor might pay particular attention to the identities and affiliations of an audience to determine which emotions might be most effective in persuading that audience. For example, a rhetor addressing a group of female pro-choice activists might incite feelings that are accepted and valued in that group (anger, empowerment, strength). Studying the cultural contexts of a rhetorical situation as they are attached to the identities of those in an audience might help a rhetor more carefully choose her emotional appeals.

\textsuperscript{17} Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee even discuss Bush’s use of pathos in their \textit{Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students}. They suggest it was important for Bush to take advantage of the immediate intensity of emotions following 9/11, reflecting a spatial and temporal understanding of emotions.
However, it’s not difficult to imagine the potential trouble of invoking these two approaches, as scholars try to reconcile emotion as part of the cognitive processing of the individual and emotion in social and cultural constructs. When we imagine these two forces in a situation, they seem to be heterogeneous: cognitive emotions originate inside the individual and social emotions originate outside the individual and are imposed on him. This makes it difficult to imagine how, in practice, we can integrate these forces within a coherent way of addressing emotion rhetorically, as the individual seems to be situated as a screen through which emotions unilaterally move in and out. Of course both cognitive and social theories are more complicated than this, as scholars from both approaches have argued in addressing critiques. Yet there’s little precedence for how a rhetor might embrace both approaches to emotion in practice. In part, this is a disciplinary issue, since philosophers and social scientists are invested in studying particular sites. Rhetoricians who deal with individual rhetors and audience members within social and cultural contexts would be interested in how these approaches work and interact with each other. A theory of pathos should grow out of an understanding of emotion on both cognitive and social levels. In the following sections (rereading and pedagogy), we can see how difficult it is to integrate productive, coherent ways of invoking these two influences, especially in practice.
Rereading Aristotle’s *Pathos*

Cognitive and social approaches to emotion have inspired rereadings of *pathos* (mostly but not all neo-Aristotelian) that 1) heighten our awareness of its many roles in persuasive communication and 2) complicate our understanding of the concept itself. Rereading has, of course, been an important practice in our field and there are many varied examples of it,\(^\text{18}\) here, I’ll turn to a few brief examples to exemplify how cognitive and social approaches have influenced relatively recent studies of *pathos*.

The first kind of rereading takes the influx in emotion scholarship as an occasion to recognize the (often overlooked) role of *pathos* in the rhetorical tradition. We can see this, for example, in Susanna Engbers’ (2007) rereading of Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s use of *pathos* in her speeches. While several scholars have attributed Cady Stanton’s success to her mastery of masculine discourse conventions, Engbers asserts that it was also her mastery of feminine-seeming appeals to emotion—specifically her ability to conjure sympathy through use of vivid, sensory language—that made her speeches so effective. Engbers builds off of the social and feminist work of reclaiming emotion, and asserts that *pathos* has often been systemically ignored in the rhetorical tradition. Because, as Krista Ratcliffe (1996) has suggested, the Western tradition names emotion as “illogical, irrational, nonsensical, untrue, invalid” (19), *pathos* has often been a more cursory focus in rhetorical analysis. The practice of rereading, as many feminist

rhetorical scholars have illustrated, often serves to identify and reconsider rhetorical and discursive traditions that might be considered more feminine (like emotion). Although this vein of scholarship takes advances in emotion scholarship as an occasion to highlight the role of *pathos*, it doesn’t necessarily consider the concept anew; while it emphasizes the importance of understanding emotions as gendered, it gives few clues as to how we might use that understanding in practice.

The second kind of rereading, however, aims to use cognitive and social approaches to more directly reconsider how *pathos* (especially the Aristotelian concept) has been defined and developed rhetorically. This is, of course, a delicate task because we have to be careful not to produce anachronistic rereadings, as Jeff Walker (2000) reminds us. He asserts, for example, that “the Aristotelian account of *pathos* implies a rhetoric that is not quite ‘Aristotelian,’ at least not in the usual neo-Aristotelian sense, and that is quite probably at odds with what Aristotle himself preferred” ("Pathos" 76). The recent surge of cognitive theories that portray emotions as intentional, he says, is not likely true to Aristotle’s original purposes, since the common Greek understanding was that emotions could not be “consciously willed or ‘commanded’ into existence” ("Pathos" 83). In rushing to reread Aristotle through recent trends in emotion studies, some scholars, Walker asserts, have ignored the heart of his theory.

However, Walker illustrates through careful study of the enthemyme, in

---

his 1994 article “The Body of Persuasion: A Theory of the Enthymeme,” how cognitive and social approaches to emotion can be better invoked. Because the root of enthymeme (thymos or heart) is the “seat of emotions and desires or motive, of the sometimes uncontrollable forces of desire and wish that drive human intentionality,” Walker suggests pathos had a more important role in the enthymeme (or enthymeme construction) than scholars once thought (“Body” 48-9). He asserts, “the three traditional sources of persuasion-ethos, logos, pathos-are not separate kinds of ‘proof’ but simultaneous dimensions of the enthymeme” (“Body” 60). Through etymological and historical work, Walker emphasizes that Book II of Aristotle’s Rhetoric already uses a social and cultural approach to emotion along with a cognitive one. Walker uses contemporary theories to highlight what has always been present in and central to Aristotle’s work.

Similarly, Ellen Quandahl (2003) carefully acknowledges the cultural context of ancient Greece to assert that Aristotle’s writing on emotions is based on his observations of others in his culture. She draws on Aristotle’s identity as a teacher of rhetoric to suggest his take on emotions was centrally or substantially pedagogical in nature. Aristotle is “an indispensable predecessor for acknowledging and working with rather than against emotion in rhetorical education” (11). His writing recognizes emotions as situational, yet they also have an underlying pedagogical purpose that always considers what is best for citizens and orators. Quandahl’s rereading emphasizes the political landscape of Aristotle’s time—in addition to considering his daily life and investments in Greek society. Like Walker, Quandahl uses the recent resurgence of studies in
emotion to reread the role emotions played for Aristotle in his writing—but more importantly in his teaching.

Taking up what has arguably been the most promising rereading of Aristotle’s concept *pathos* to date, Michael Hyde and Craig Smith (1991) examine Book II of the *Rhetoric* in conjunction with Heidegger’s analysis of mood. The problem with the (mostly neo-Aristotelian) way Book II is often read, they assert, is that it fails to recognize that “emotions function primordially as vehicles for the active sensibility of human beings, that they are interrelated and exist along continua, and that they have the power to transform the temporal and spatial existence of our publicness, our everyday being-with-others” (461). Hyde and Smith emphasize that Aristotle presented his discussion of emotions, not as a mere list of independent examples, but in pairs (anger-calm, friendship-enmity, fear-confidence, shame-shamelessness, kindness-cruelty, pity indignation, and envy-emulation) that each form a dynamic continuum. This mode of presentation suggests that our attention should be less on the causes of discrete emotions and more on the relations between emotions, the dynamic interactions between emotions, and how all that affects our experience with them. Thus, a rhetorical study of emotions should consider not just how emotions are appealed to but how speakers move audiences between emotional pairs. As Hyde and Smith assert, “Touching one pathe affects others that are part of the human emotional web; the webbing runs along continua that help bring listeners into the same frame of mind” (456). If emotions exist on continua, the rhetor’s job is either to push the listeners along a continuum from one end to the other or to keep them in a more settled, “least affected” state.
To accept Hyde and Smith’s reading means that our concept of the emotional appeal needs to be expanded to recognize 1) that we are dealing with emotional dynamics or patterns of emotion and not discrete emotional episodes/states, and 2) that our grasp of what emotions do (push and motivate) is deficient and needs to include an understanding of how—exactly—emotions open up aspects of the world, rhetorically operating complexly with affect and bodily movement. Put otherwise, emotional appeals, they suggest, do not just “motivate” thought, belief, and action; they have a much richer role to play in our discursive (rhetorical) lives. While Hyde and Smith make a compelling call to reconsider and expand Aristotle’s concept *pathos*, no one has yet responded.

While Walker and Quandahl’s rereadings use advances in emotion research to offer a more nuanced portrayal of Aristotle’s concept of *pathos*, these aspects of his theory of *pathos* have been there all along. Walker and Quandahl don’t reshape the concept *pathos* as much as they use recent advances in emotion research to point out how much of it was overlooked in the first place. Though a relatively new focus in rhetorical studies, many scholars across disciplines have turned back to point out the complexities of Aristotle’s theory. Long before cognitive and social approaches, Heidegger famously called Book II “the first systematic hermeneutic of everydayness of being with one another,” and it became the basis of his theory of Dasein (178). He asserts, “the fundamental ontological interpretation of affects has hardly been able to take one step worthy of mention since Aristotle” (138).

---

20 Even Freud claimed that psychoanalytic theories of verbal suggestion resonated with Aristotle’s Book II.
Rereadings of Aristotle’s concept *pathos* have pointed our attention back to the concept itself and how nuanced it is, but except for the yet-pursued openings Hyde and Smith’s rereading offers, we don’t get a sense of how to take advantage of these rereadings rhetorically. Arguably, this is a matter of the purpose of rereading; it’s a practice that puts forth new interpretations of texts and doesn’t necessarily put those interpretations into practice. However, cognitive and social approaches to emotion have also contributed to recent pedagogies in the field.

**Pedagogies of Emotion**

We might expect that in practice, in pedagogy, it might be easier to invoke both cognitive and social approaches to emotion, yet the trends I detail in this section show how emotion scholarship has been used primarily in cultural studies-like analyses of our discipline and pedagogies—an approach that while valuable fails to address how we can rhetorically respond to or change these emotional conditions. An extension of social inquiries into emotion, much of this line of scholarship considers how emotion is disciplined—both on a societal level and within the academy. In the collection *A Way to Move: Rhetorics of Emotion & Composition Studies*, editors Dale Jacobs and Laura Micciche assert: “the personal and the professional are always interconnected, making the commonplace idea that emotion is solely ‘personal’ an untenable and insufficient claim because it fails to consider the way emotion refuses to be contained in our ‘personal’ lives” (6). This resonates with scholars who have written about
experiences with professional emotions, for instance shame (J. Brooks Bouson (2005), Schell (2006), and Di Leo (2006)). Bouson describes ours as “a time when, as the job market is collapsing and tenure is being slowly eroded, the Ph.D. degree is becoming an emblem not of intellectual pride but of failure for those forced into the dismal world of the adjunct instructor” (625). She asserts a “decline of civility in the profession” contributes to public ridicule at conferences, disparaging those on the bottom of the academic hierarchy (627). This vein of scholarship explores the emotional, social conditions that academics navigate and in naming particular emotions, brings the scholarship within the purview of cognitive approaches to emotion. While these inquiries into disciplinary and academic emotions are important for better understanding our (emotional) work in this culture, they don’t discuss the role pathetic appeals or strategies might have in the (re)construction of these emotional conditions.

Several scholars assert that academic emotional conditions might be most tangible in our classrooms.21 The most frequently cited work on pedagogies of emotion in the field is Lynn Worsham’s “Going Postal” which critiques our cultural education in emotion, describing the “hidden curriculum” of emotion in

---

21 Another important consideration for theorizing pathos in the classroom is through our use of textbooks. See Gretchen Fletcher Moon’s 2003 article “The Pathos of Pathos: The Treatment of Emotion in Contemporary Composition Textbooks” for an overview of how textbooks in the field tend to deal with pathos. A particularly strong example of introducing pathos to students is Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee’s Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students. They achieve an important balance in presenting emotions as personal, embodied, rational, and intelligent. They reframe the way pathos has been situated historically, suggesting the ancients often attached emotional appeals to the logical and thought emotions had “heuristic potential” to move an audience from one place to the next.
capitalist society; emotions like “grief, hatred, bitterness, anger, rage, terror, and apathy” dominate our affective lives (217). Composition and cultural studies responded to this violent emotional culture with “radical pedagogy,” but Worsham asserts it rarely accomplishes the decolonization it intends. Both critical and experiential pedagogies tend to still ascribe to uncomplicated theories of emotion, if they attend to emotion at all:

Critical pedagogy fails to be sufficiently critical; it does not carefully consider, through a subtly articulated discourse of emotion, how students have been taught to name their affective lives, how they might begin the process of renaming and rephrasing. Critical pedagogy does not make emotion and affective life the crucial stakes in political struggle. With its rhetoric focused on pleasure and empowerment, critical pedagogy works against itself to remystify not only the objective conditions of human suffering but also the varied experience of suffering. (235)

Worsham gets closest to explaining how these larger cultural/emotional phenomena play out in our everyday work, yet she also points to several obstacles that stand in the way of more nuanced applications of emotion studies, for example, a lack of attention to primary schooling in emotion, a lack of emotional vocabularies, or the gendered division of (emotional) labor. Worsham’s main

---

22 Many affect and emotion scholars have made the claim that a lack of vocabulary to describe affective and emotional experience prevents us from more complicated understandings. Teresa Brennan (2004), for example, asserts, “It then behooves us, as a species, to reconnect language and understanding with the fleshly and environmental codes from which our consciousness had split by fantasy and illusion” (148-9). Additionally, see Massumi (2002), Boler (1999),
critiques of critical pedagogy lie in the penchant to recognize emotion as either a positive or negative force. In highlighting the relationship between being “sufficiently critical” and cultivating “pleasure and empowerment,” we see the tendency to align emotion either with the negativity of critique or the positivity of empowerment.23

This tendency underlies much of the scholarship on pedagogy and emotion in the humanities, as we can see in, for example, Dale Jacob’s (2005) a pedagogy of hope, Laura Micciche’s (2007) a pedagogy of wonder, Megan Boler’s (1999) pedagogy of discomfort, or Katarzyna Marciniak’s (2010) pedagogy of anxiety. Through the “difficult emotions” of fear or discomfort, scholars suggest students will recognize truths about the world, conjure more self-awareness, and learn to be more “critical” about the discourses that surround them. Through pedagogies that focus on more positive (e.g., hope, wonder) emotions, scholars suggest students will develop a kind of curiosity that allows them to see their worlds anew. Both of these sets of pedagogies promise a kind of emotional enlightenment, forged through a path of negative emotional analysis or positive emotional invention. Focusing on emotion as inherently positive or negative distracts us though from grasping a more complicated understanding of emotion—one that a concept of pathos could grow out of. I’ll describe an example of a positive and a negative emotional pedagogy, and then show how they

---

23 Interestingly, “affect” also tends to be theorized as either “good” or “bad,” as Claire Hemmings (2005) has noted; she asserts scholars tend to use “affect” with “the pessimism of social determinism (including bad affect) or the optimism of affective freedom (good affect)” (551).
struggle to reconcile an understanding of emotion as simultaneously cognitive and social.

The primary emotions considered in Micciche’s *Doing Emotion: Rhetoric, Writing, Teaching* are empathy and wonder. Because she emphasizes how emotion is performative, enacted and embodied, she writes about a “deep embodiment pedagogy,” which grows out of cultural and performance theory, and which asks students to embody or perform others peoples’ emotions. One of the exercises asks students to record someone else’s everyday conversation, transcribe it, and then perform it. This exercise encourages students to feel empathy for what it’s like to live in another person’s body and social position: “Rather than studying emotioned bodies as textual features for analysis, a performative approach attempts to make physical the realities of being a certain kind of body in the world” (56). In another example, students record themselves reading a passage of a text aloud, compare their reading to others, and then perform others’ readings. Taking on another person’s physical and cultural identity through performing a text pushes students out of passive interpretation and analysis: “Deep embodiment . . . opens us to experimentation with inhabiting, as much as possible, another’s embodied emotions through an intimate relation to words as well as through bodily-based performance of those words” (60). Micciche uses a social approach to emotion by emphasizing that all bodies are situated in social and cultural contexts. The empathy that students experience, Micciche suggests, can fuel students’ critical and rhetorical work, drawing on the inventive capacities of emotion. Courses that are “highly charged” and “emotionally sensitive,” she suggests, might benefit from “classroom
activities that ask students to perform one facet of an illness, character, or author (as well as what they perceive to be an alternative characteristic) with a particular focus on the emotionally entailed in each performance” (69). Through the practice of empathy and in cultivating wonder (efforts that reflect a cognitive approach of identifying particular emotions but also a social approach by emphasizing that bodies are always socialized), deep embodiment pedagogy promises to incite new experiences and ideas for students.

Focusing, instead, on inciting critical readings through more negative emotional experience, education scholar Megan Boler puts forth her theory of a “pedagogy of discomfort” in *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education*. Boler asserts fear is the primary emotion when it comes to not seeing, ignoring, and dismissing the injustices that surround us. This “emotional selectivity” is what we use to repress and sanction “unacceptable” emotions, but we must, she says, “examine how our modes of seeing have been shaped specifically by the dominant culture of the historical moment” (179). Thus, Boler makes the practice of what she calls “collective witnessing” central in her pedagogy of discomfort; to engage in an emotional critical inquiry students must “collectively witness” (rather than individually reflect on) “how emotion shapes what and how they see—and don’t see” (177). Boler gives examples of looking at photos of lynchings or the video of Rodney King’s beating to examine the privileges of spectatorship. Essentially, this pedagogy asks students and instructors to collectively question their beliefs and values, to reveal “visual habits” or “habits of inattention” that keep us from witnessing our surroundings. In asking students to recognize and name the emotions felt in witnessing violence, Boler emphasizes a cognitive approach to
emotions, alongside considerations of the historical and cultural moment. The goal of Boler’s pedagogy is to create a collective experience of discomfort that she hopes will help students dwell in ambiguity, to inspire more critical readings of cultural events.

What these pedagogies offer, unlike the scholarly practice of rereading rhetoric’s past, is a look at what it means to incite emotion. While Boler and Micciche aren’t in a conventional rhetorical situation per se, they use pathos to incite particular emotions through the scenarios and experiences they ask students to participate in. Boler and Micciche use both cognitive and social approaches to emotion in the hopes of inciting discomfort and empathy, albeit with different emphases in each case. In choosing particular kinds of emotion, they suggest they are invoking a cognitive understanding of emotion, yet neither spends the time to consider the logics of these emotions—how they work and are best developed. Rather Micciche’s and Boler’s logics seems to rely on socially expected responses to particular objects. For example, the social expectation is that witnessing violence makes you feel uncomfortable, and “taking a walk in another person’s shoes” makes you feel empathy. And upon this witnessing or embodying, Boler and Micciche hope students will be propelled into social/political action of some kind. However, we know from cognitive theory that an emotion like empathy, for example, is very complicated. Empathy can quickly turn into resentment or relief depending on the object of empathy. As Dennis Lynch has suggested in his writing on empathy:

Those who start from positions of privilege seem to have no clear motivation to empathize with others less fortunate, at least
motivation that is in line with “their” interests, while those who start from positions of relative disadvantage only stand to lose more ground by giving ground—through empathy—to their opposition. The social field is not even, and, given this critique, the call to empathize can suddenly seem inadequate, as if hidden in that call were the bound-to-fail message, “Just listen, and in time the dynamics of power will flatten themselves out” (9).

The uneven social field Lynch mentions would likely play out in the composition classroom: if I’m performing/embodying the actions of someone who I deem is better off, my empathy can quickly turn into resentment; if I’m performing/embodying the actions of someone who I deem is worse off, my empathy can quickly turn into self-satisfaction or even relief as I’m reminded of my good fortune. Empathy is also a difficult emotion to maintain; in the moment of the embodiment exercise and shortly thereafter, I might feel empathy but with temporal and spatial distance from the object of empathy (the experience of the exercise), it diminishes. Thus, empathy alone—or reduced in this manner of execution—might not be best suited to inspire social and political engagement. Without a more detailed analysis of empathy, Micciche fails to fully take advantage of a cognitive approach to emotion. In hoping that the “positive” experience of empathy will result in a classroom environment that is both more critical but also aware of their social stratification, Micciche seems to ascribe to what Lynch calls the “bound-to-fail message”: “Just listen, and in time the dynamics of power will flatten themselves out.”
Similarly, a cognitive look at “discomfort” uncovers the potential difficulty of invoking it in the classroom. In part this is because discomfort works more like a mood than an emotion; its object tends to be broad or ambiguous. We can imagine how a first-year student might view something like the video of the Rodney King beating and feel discomfort, yet the object of that discomfort is likely broad or undetermined. That discomfort could arguably be directed at police officers, Rodney King, the history of American racism, the justice system, the teacher who is showing the video, etc. Like depression or anxiety, discomfort rarely has a clear object. This discomfort could easily manifest as a vague mistrust or suspicion of society in general—hardly the kind of emotional experience that would inspire one to enact social and political change. Because discomfort functions more like a mood than an emotion, it tends to be more difficult to identify and change.

These pedagogies hope emotional experience will inspire students to feel something new that will lead to more critical, socially aware reading and analysis. However, it’s unclear the extent to which the emotional structures of empathy or discomfort will incite the kind of change that is desired. The tendency to cast emotion as primarily positive or negative overshadows the more subtle work of emotion. The assumption seems to be that a positive or negative emotional experience will lead to more complicated reading and writing. But couldn’t a neutral emotional experience (sans shock value) or more complex patterns of emotion also produce more complicated reading and writing? Though both Micciche and Boler clearly benefit from cognitive and social approaches to emotion, it becomes clear in their writing how difficult it is to invoke both of
these approaches together in practice; both scholars lean on a tenuous understanding of emotions as cognitive in hopes it will reveal social and cultural disparities and manifestations of emotions.

The Current State of Pathos

Though it was likely the hope of Walker, Quandahl, and Hyde and Smith that scholars would take up and carry forward their work to reconfigure a theory of pathos, that hope has not yet been realized. Their work—scholarly and provocative as it is—just left us wanting more to figure out what it might mean to put into practice claims like “reason and affect are inseparably interwoven” (Walker 60), “our study of the moral/emotions must be centered in discourse” (Quandahl 21), or “[t]he use of [Aristotle’s] complex and subtle descriptions [of the emotions] allow critics to correct past analyses of emotional appeals by adding dimensions that have been ignored for too long and, as we hope we have made clear, are absolutely crucial to the public character of our being-with-others” (462). Likewise, scholars who’ve investigated pedagogies of emotion likely hoped that a better understanding of how we are educated in and through emotion would lead to more careful and productive understandings of emotions for students and instructors. While progress has been made in this regard, this line of scholarship doesn’t easily translate into better understandings of how we or our students can better use pathos in our own works.

The scholarship on rereading pathos and emotional pedagogies point out the opportunities and obstacles that cognitive and social approaches to emotion
present for rhetoric. Because cognitive approaches to emotion are more focused on the circumstances that give rise to particular emotions, as the subject experiences them, it’s less clear what happens to these seemingly private emotions as they relate to the environment, people, and objects that surround, pervade, or constitute the subject. Cognitive theories are less equipped to theorize collective experiences with emotions, to explain how personal, evaluative judgments influence the world outside of the subject. Social approaches also raise obstacles, particularly for rhetors making assumptions about the identities of an audience; we have to be weary of Hawhee’s warning about freezing bodies. Reading bodies primarily in terms of their social positionality ignores how bodies are in constant movement—moving among situations and taking on varying identities. When we make assumptions about the emotions that persuade a pro-choice woman, for example, we risk freezing her, forgetting about the many other identities and bodies in which she has lived and will live. We know that emotions function simultaneously on the levels of the cognitive and social; the task that remains is figuring out how these two different views of the emotions relate to and influence each other.

*Pathos* has always been concerned with movement: moving an audience from one emotional state to another or moving an audience toward a judgment or action. The movement of emotion in cognitive and social approaches is still relatively uncomplicated, however (as it is perceived primarily moving in and out of the human subject). Social and cognitive approaches inspire an understanding of the rhetorical situation that upholds a distinct division between the human and outside world. Within this relatively fixed situation, emotions move in a few
directions: from the context of the situation to the rhetor and audience, from the 
audience to the rhetor, and from the rhetor to the audience. With an identifiable 
rhetor, audience, and argument, the work of *pathos* is easier to identify.
However, in complex situations, when emotion is not clearly emanating from an 
audience or imposed by the rhetor, when it would seem emotion exists externally 
from human intervention, the work of *pathos* is diverse and often oblique.
Current theories of *pathos* aren’t designed to untangle emotion in a case like 
LeRoy, in which there are so many overlapping situations and pervasive emotions 
that don’t have clear origin points, rhetorical purposes, or that have varied 
rhetorical purposes.

Accounting for the many roles emotion plays in a case like LeRoy might 
seem like a better job for affect theory, which is primarily concerned with the 
emergence of affects, feelings, and emotions—as they form relations among 
human and nonhuman bodies. However, affect has often have been studied 
separately from (if not considered in opposition to) studies of emotion in our 
field. But as I’ll suggest in the next chapter, affect and emotion are not actually in 
opposition. Turning to affect theories reveals different rhetorical manifestations 
of emotions and affects that are useful for a revision of *pathos*. Because affect is 
focused on an emergence and movement that is often separate from the human 
subject, affect theory gives a better account of how emotions come into being in 
complex situations, when emotions aren’t clearly emerging from a rhetor or 
audience.
Chapter Two

Rhetorical Affects:

Invoking Affect Theory in Rhetorical Studies

Just as scholarship on emotion was taking hold in rhetoric and composition in the late ‘90s and early ‘00s, a wave of affect scholarship washed over our field. This wave, which has been prominent in disciplines across the humanities, has in many ways replaced interest in emotion studies in our field. A brief look at articles published in the last decade suggests that scholars see a lot of potential in affect, especially as rhetoricians have pursued the study of nontraditional texts and discourses, e.g. music (Rickert 2005; Hawk 2010; Halbritter 2010), animals (Hawhee 2011; Muckelbauer 2011; Davis 2011), and objects (Barnett 2010).

If the difficulty of invoking advances in emotion scholarship could be summed up as a struggle to reconcile two varied approaches that capture two (seemingly separate) parts of the rhetorical situation, the difficulty with invoking affect theory is that it’s often defined such that affect can’t be contained or
expressed in terms of the rhetorical situation, at least traditionally defined. Because affect is commonly understood as being nonlinguistic and pre-cognitive, it seems to exceed the capture of rhetorical theory—an impression that usually grows out of Massumi’s work on affect and his influence on the field. The integration of Massumi’s work in our field frequently focuses on a distinction between affect and emotion, using it to suggest that affect is separate from emotion and thus has more potential. This chapter, through a closer look at Massumi’s work on affect, troubles that distinction which is so often cited in affect scholarship in our field.\textsuperscript{24}

Massumi’s theory gives us some vocabulary to talk about the more visceral, bodily, or fleeting aspects of rhetoric, yet because it aims to capture something noncognitive, beyond language and discourse, it isn’t easily explained in rhetorical terms. However, other theories of affect have been used in the field to highlight different roles for affect in rhetoric, namely Fredric Jameson’s. His affect theory has been used primarily for pedagogical purposes, but I’ll suggest that we can also use Jameson’s theory to better understand the recursivity of affect in the rhetorical situation—how affect both propels and contains a rhetorical situation. However, because both Massumi and Jameson theorize affect as impersonal, it’s often difficult to imagine how the individual becomes tied up in affect (aside from a vague understanding of how affect operates through a kind of crowd mentality), so I’ll turn finally and briefly to Lacan’s

\textsuperscript{24} For example in Cory Holding (2007), Jenny Edbauer Rice (2008), Ashley Falzetti (2008), Catherine Chaput (2010), Byron Hawk (2004).
concept “desire” to consider how affects manifest in the investments and motivations of a rhetor or audience.

Before I turn to Massumi, Jameson, and Lacan, I’ll look at how affect theory has primarily been defined and used in the field. In this brief explication I hope to show why it has thus far seemed to be beyond the purview of the concept *pathos*. Because “affect” is often used in the field to denote another realm\(^{25}\) (like the social, cultural, material, or environmental), much of this scholarship focuses on acknowledging its existence and influence but stops short of considering how we can take advantage of affect rhetorically. A rhetorical understanding of affect requires a study of the role affects play in the production, development, and movement of rhetoric—the sort of study I begin in this chapter.

**Affect: Defining the Indefinable**

“Affect,” as any scholar devoted to studying the phenomenon will likely tell you, breaks us out of a humanistic approach to rhetoric. Unlike emotion which struggles with the long standing (mis)conceptions of being too personal, irrational, or weak to be worthy of study, affect by definition can never be personal, irrational, or weak; its indeterminacy makes it a force whose influence can never be fully grasped and whose effects can never be fully represented. And it is this very indeterminacy that makes affect theorists see such great social and

\[^{25}\text{Take for example Sharon Crowley (2006), Donna Strickland (2007), Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes (2010), or Jeff Pruchnic and Kim Lacey (2011) who call attention to affective features of writing and rhetoric but only as tangentially produced by or related to the main focus of their projects.}\]
political potential in its study. Historian Ruth Leys in “The Turn to Affect: A Critique” asserts that what motivates affect scholars is their desire to reveal a kind of alternate history, contesting the historical privileging of rationality. Political, ethical, and aesthetic judgments have always had an affective component that we are only just recently willing to acknowledge. Leys writes of the affect scholarship, generally:

The claim is that we human beings are corporeal creatures imbued with subliminal affective intensities and resonances that so decisively influence or condition our political and other beliefs that we ignore those affective intensities and resonances at our peril—not only because doing so leads us to underestimate the political harm that the deliberate manipulation of our affective lives can do but also because we will otherwise miss the potential for ethical creativity and transformation that “technologies of the self” designed to work on our embodied being can help bring about (436).

For many affect scholars, there are real ethical and political stakes in ignoring our affective lives. Summarizing the work of “the new affect theorists” (Nigel Thrift, Eric Shouse, Brian Massumi, and William Connolly), Leys asserts that affect is seen as separate from and prior to ideology, giving affect a unique position from which to critique and transform ideology. For these theorists, Leys claims, affects “are nonsignifying, autonomic processes that take place below the threshold of conscious awareness and meaning . . . affects are ‘inhuman,’ ‘pre-subjective,’ ‘visceral’ forces and intensities that influence our thinking and judgments but are
separate from these” (440). Affects are noncognitive bodily states or processes, yet they can also extend through and beyond bodies, as Patricia Clough suggests in her introduction to The Affective Turn, “Affect is also theorized in relation to the technologies that are allowing us both to ‘see’ affect and to produce affective bodily capacities beyond the body’s organic physiological constraints” (2). Thus, affects are not exclusive to humans; they don’t belong to anyone or anything but rather circulate among us.

While the influence of affect theory in our field has been clear for some time, figuring out what it means—or has meant—for us is less so. As theories of affect gained attention across the humanities in the last several decades, scholars have taken up “affect” and used it as synonymous with emotion or to describe physical feeling, social force, or intensity. Likewise, when scholars in rhetoric and composition first started writing about affect, it was often used interchangeably with or as a supplement to emotion. Susan McLeod (1987, 1995) and Alice Brand (1989, 1990) published a number of articles on the affective aspects of writing and teaching, wherein affects were, or seemed, undifferentiated from emotions. Richard Fulkerson (1998), Lynn Worsham (1998), and Robert Hariman and John Lucaites (2001) similarly tended to conflate affect and emotion. Worsham’s oft-cited reference to emotion as “the tight braid of affect and judgment, socially and historically constructed and bodily lived” illustrates how fused affect and emotion were for scholars at that

26 For example, Christa Albrecht-Crane (2003), in her description of the concept, captures the visceral, sensual connotations that affect often has in our field: “Affect, then, involves sensations and resonances we engage in, on a daily basis, that act on our bodies in such a way that we feel a sort of vibration with other bodies” (“Affirmative” 577).
time ("Going" 216). Only since scholars in the field have begun to invoke Massumi’s theory of affect in the last decade has a stark and more clearly delineated distinction between affect and emotion emerged.

Reviewing Affect

Marking perhaps the height of interest in affect in the field, between 1998-2008 CCC, JAC, and QJS published extended book reviews whose purposes were in part to introduce readers to the term “affect” but also to consider its purpose in the field. These reviews\textsuperscript{27} expose a number of reasons why affect hasn’t yet been harnessed specifically to re-evaluate the concept pathos—ranging from assertions that affect is not rhetorical to acknowledging the complicated disciplinary and political choice of choosing “affect” over “emotion.”

The first and most amusing review suggests that affect isn’t rhetorical, or rather that the concept affect takes us beyond the purview of rhetoric, proper. Richard Fulkerson’s 1998 review “Call Me Horatio: Negotiating Between Cognition and Affect in Composition”\textsuperscript{28} in CCC marks the very beginning of affect theory entering the field. As his subtitle suggests, Fulkerson sees affect and

\textsuperscript{27} An additional review by Jeff Pruchnic (2008) in Criticism, “The Invisible Gland: Affect and Political Economy,” won’t be detailed in this section since the audience for the review extends beyond those in our field, yet it’s another strong example of a scholar trying to make sense of the implications of the “affective turn.”

\textsuperscript{28} Fulkerson reviews Presence of Mind: Writing and the Domain Beyond the Cognitive, eds. Alice Glarden and Richard Graves; The Spiritual Side of Writing: Releasing the Learner’s Whole Potential, eds. Regina Paston Foehr and Susan Schiller; Notes on the Heart: Affective Issues in the Writing Classroom by Susan McLeod; and Getting Restless: Rethinking Revision in Writing Instruction by Nancy Welch.
cognition as competing forces, and he asserts that we attend to affect at the expense of the cognitive and rhetorical. When he imagines what a composition class inspired by noncognitive/affective practices might look like, he writes:

Clearly, the goal would change. Instead of trying to make students more effective users of language to have rhetorical impacts on others, I would be interested in the effects writing could have on the students themselves. Students might still write for readers, but the goal would be rendering experience for sharing rather than informing or persuading. (113)

Fulkerson is, of course, working with an early understanding of affect that grows out of expressivist approaches to composition; his weariness toward affect exemplifies both the difficulty affect and emotion scholarship had being accepted into the mainstream (especially with the dominance of social and cognitive approaches to teaching composition) and the scholarship’s inability to dissociate from an expressivist tradition. Fulkerson laments the danger of an affective pedagogy: “This would not be a postmodern or socially engaged classroom. By and large it wouldn’t have students writing about issues of class, race, and gender, or public policy (unless from a purely personal point of view)” (113). For Fulkerson, affect is not only too personal but also too spiritual, whimsical, and meditative to be of much use in rhetorical studies and education.

Nine years later, however, we can see that the affective terrain has shifted, as scholars in the field have a more centralized understanding of affect—one that
is not simply personal—or emotional. Cory Holding in “Affecting Rhetoric”\textsuperscript{29} in \textit{CCC} asserts, affect is rhetorical but almost impossible to harness. Turning to Corbett’s distinction between the rhetoric of the open hand and the closed fist, she explains how the closed fist is emblematic of a “body rhetoric” or a “gut force” that affect propels. Because affect theory turns our attention to beginnings and becomings, Holding sees it as particularly useful in considering bodies’ role in rhetorical invention. She suggests there’s a lot of potential in studying bodily experiences like entrainment\textsuperscript{30} as rhetorical. This kind of study, Holding writes, in turn can be said to position bodies (if, for instance, pheromones and images can serve as direction-givers to the subject that absorbs them), which, when taken to the political domain, does present something of a case for attending to visceral force through rhetorical invention. (322)

Holding asserts we can’t afford to ignore the “gut” or visceral forces in rhetoric, but acknowledges the difficulty of harnessing it rhetorically or fully understanding the range of its influence.

The third review highlights the political and disciplinary investments in choosing “affect” vs. choosing “emotion” as key methodological terms in our studies. In 2008, \textit{JAC} published a review by Ashley Falzetti, “Political Affects:

\begin{itemize}
\item Holding reviews \textit{The Transmission of Affect} by Teresa Brennan; \textit{Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism} by Sharon Crowley; and \textit{Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect} by Denise Riley
\item A process through which bodies synchronize with internal/biological and external rhythms, e.g. your body’s adjustment to the cue of sunlight in the morning.
\end{itemize}
Transdisciplinary Trajectories of Affect and Emotion.”

Falzetti asserts that what “affect” means in the literature is “highly contested,” “[y]et it is apparent that those who study affect are interested in close analysis of the body, emotion, and social politics” (302). While scholarship on affect and emotion overlaps in methodology and scope, scholars studying these two veins have little interaction. This contentious relationship is perhaps the most obvious reason why affect hasn’t been used to extend our understanding of pathos, since pathos has always been theorized in terms of emotion.

The final review most thoroughly explores affect in rhetorical terms. Jenny Edbauer Rice’s review “The New ‘New’: Making a Case for Critical Affect Studies” (2008) in QJS makes a case for what she calls “critical affect studies” (CAS) in rhetoric, considering affect’s potential in public and civic interaction. Rather than conceptualizing the public sphere solely as a “deliberative space” in which people communicate directly and transparently, she asserts we ought to consider the “affective linkages and associations” that already exist in any public; affect encourages us, in other words, to consider what underlies and slips between our various civic interactions.

Unlike most of the previously cited work in this chapter on affect—which emphasizes its inaccessibility through language and cognition—Edbauer Rice maintains that affect can be rearticulated in public discourse; she, like Holding,

31 Falzetti reviews Marlene Sokolon’s Political Emotions: Aristotle and the Symphony of Reason and Emotion and Kathleen Stewart’s Ordinary Affects.
offers an opening for rhetorical intervention. She asserts, “Theories of affect suggest a process of disarticulation, or an unsticking of those figures that seem to be glued together, followed by a rearticulation, or a new way of linking together images and representations that is less oppressive” (210). Rhetorically analyzing the discourses around AIDS, Edbauer Rice claims that activists changed the public discourse surrounding AIDS away from death and disgust toward life and celebration through campaigns and advertisements; the activist community reshaped the affectivity attached to AIDS discourse and by extension those suffering from AIDS. This process of rearticulation (in this case making images of happy, lively people with AIDS the focal point of the public discourse) makes use of pathetic strategies to move a public audience from associating AIDS with one set of emotions to another. Edbauer Rice thereby gives us our first hint of what it looks like to reshape affect rhetorically, and she raises a compelling question that captures one dilemma surrounding the study of affect in our field:

Thus, what underscores civic or rhetorical deliberation is arguably an affective element. It is unclear whether merely accounting for this characteristic will lead to more critical analyses, although expanding our understanding of public affect might help us understand why certain rhetorics retain powerful circulation. (211)

Most of the affect scholarship in the field seems to have “accounted for” the “affective element,” yet this hasn’t led to more critical analyses of how rhetorical concepts like pathos, for example, work in rhetoric. This distinction is central in delineating the work that has been done and remains to be done with affect in our field. The more difficult, but I think more fruitful, task is figuring out a better
rhetorical understanding of affect and how it works, which is what Edbauer Rice’s description of affective reticulation begins to do.

Very few scholars have taken up the challenge of studying affect in conjunction with rhetorical theories. In respect to pathos, Byron Hawk (2004) highlights a common conceptual distinction in our understanding of pathos and affect in the field: “Pathos is about using ideas/feelings in an audience to ground persuasion or about creating those emotions in an audience. But affect moves us toward relations among bodies, which is critical to understanding (discourse in) network culture” (“Toward” 843). Traditional theories of pathos don’t account for how “bodies also respond ‘emotionally’ not just minds” (“Toward” 842). Hawk captures a general consensus in the field that affect exceeds the work of pathos, that pathos, traditionally conceived and talked about, fails to account for emotioned bodies and the interrelatedness of bodies. Pathos has been thus far used to explain a conscious and intentional understanding of human interaction in a rhetorical situation, which doesn’t yet account for the roles affect and emotion play in the “media environments” Hawk suggests we can no longer afford to ignore. These media environments—which play a central role in not just portraying the case of mass hysteria in LeRoy but also in the progression and transmission of symptoms—might be best explicated by theories of affect, but as I hope to show in later chapters, these rhetorical considerations of affect might also become part of our use and analysis of pathos in mediated rhetorical events. However, figuring out how affect fits into a theory of pathos requires a better understanding of the relationship between affect and emotion. This relationship
is largely understood through Massumi’s distinction, which I’ll detail in the following section.

The Massumi Affect

To understand how affect has been brought into the field, we have to begin with the oft-cited source: Massumi. Often recognized as the preeminent scholar in affect studies since (and interpreter of) Deleuze, Massumi develops his theory of affect most extensively in “Autonomy of Affect” (1996), which later became the first chapter in *Parables for the Virtual* (2002). The primary goal of the book is to address bodies, their movement, and sensations—considerations that he maintains have been neglected in critical and cultural theory. A response to the linguistic traditions so popular in poststructuralism, he aims to put bodies back in cultural materialism. Theorizing affect, Massumi asserts, can help us achieve this. In a little over 20 pages, Massumi uses scientific studies and cultural examples to identify affect as a phenomenon that cannot be satisfactorily explained solely with recourse to contemporary understandings of bodies, senses, or emotions.

When scholars in the field reference Massumi’s definition of affect, they often begin with his distinction between affect and emotion. Even though Massumi spends just a few paragraphs detailing the difference between the two in this text, it has arguably become his most prominent contribution to the study of affect (quoted, cited, or presumed), as those passages are widely referenced across disciplines. In those passages, Massumi makes one of the most direct and
urgent claims to come out of his otherwise circuitous writing: “It is crucial to theorize the difference between affect and emotion. If some have the impression that affect has waned, it is because affect is unqualified. As such, it is not ownable or recognizable and thus resistant to critique” (28). Referencing Jameson’s claim about the “waning of affect” in our time. Massumi points out the paradox inherent in theorizing affect: we ought to study affect but when we bring it into consciousness, into language, we qualify it, and through this process, affect is no longer affect but is brought into the realm of emotion. One of the problems, he says, is that we have no cultural-theoretical vocabulary to discuss affect; we are left with theories of signification which adhere to the kinds of structures that affect transcends. This almost cryptic definition has been critiqued by a number of scholars. Claire Hemming (2005), for example, asserts, “While many will concur with Massumi’s scepticism of quantitative research in its inability to attend to the particular, we are left with a riddle-like description of affect as something scientists cannot detect the loss of (in the anomaly), social scientists and cultural critics cannot interpret, but philosophers can imagine” (“Invoking” 563).

Given the bluntness of the claim that “It is crucial to theorize the difference between affect and emotion,” amid writing that is famously paradoxical and oblique, it’s no surprise that a lot of scholars in our field have hung onto this distinction so tightly. Yet, the distinction is often read and appropriated as a claim that we ought to theorize affect over or against—or at least in addition to but separately from—emotion, suggesting that our theorization of emotion has gotten in the way of seeing and appreciating affect.
But a closer look at his writing reveals that Massumi sees affect and emotion as closely related. Though he clearly privileges affect by bringing it to the fore, it turns out, upon closer look, he doesn’t discourage studying emotion. Massumi’s distinction between affect and emotion is not of value but degree. What Massumi doesn’t like about emotion is what he doesn’t like about poststructuralist theories of signification: we already have symbolic structures of emotion that are laden with meaning, and thus we lack the power to express or relate to emotion in ways that aren’t already confined by symbolic structures. Affect exceeds these symbolic structures, but “Emotion is the most intense (most contracted) expression of that capture,” the capture of affect (28). Thus, rather than seeing affect and emotion as logically distinct, in order to theorize affect at all, we need emotion; we are dependent to some extent on emotion, to use its vocabulary to attempt to better explicate affect. As further evidence, Massumi’s own affect-focused vocabulary isn’t devoid of emotional connotations and resonances: intensity, movement, autonomy, fullness, aliveness, etc.

Massumi illustrates through his examples how closely affect and emotion are related. His first example in “Autonomy” is a study of children who watched variations of a short film about a snowman melting and his human “friend” who leaves him in the mountains so that he could stay “alive” (one version had factual narration, one an emotional narration, and one no narration). When attempting to measure the affective reactions of the children, intensity (our best way for understanding affect) is measured in part through a spectrum of emotions: happy-sad. When describing the version of the snowman film that had an emotional narrative, he explains:
The qualification of emotional content enhanced the image’s effect, as if they resonated with the level of intensity rather than interfering with it. An emotional qualification breaks narrative continuity for a moment to register a state—actually to re-register an already felt state, for the skin is faster than the word. (25)

Thus, an emotional qualification, in this case a narrative, intensifies reactions to the text or increases the affective response to it; the emotional narrative (the use of emotional language; affect captured in language) is not in opposition to the production or existence of affect. Instead, they seem to work in tandem like waves.

Massumi’s methodology and general attitude toward conceptual distinctions similarly suggests that the relationship between affect and emotion shouldn’t be interpreted as finite, clear, distinct, or absolute. In his introduction to Parables, Massumi explains his approach to writing and research: “when you are busy critiquing you are less busy augmenting. You are that much less fostering” (13). “Foster or debunk,” he asserts. Though, of course, there is a time for both processes, Massumi is much less interested in dismissing past theory than in cultivating new theory. This is how he approaches writing:

The writing tries not only to accept the risk of sprouting deviant, but also to invite it. Take joy in your digressions. Because that is where the unexpected arises. That is the experimental aspect. If you know where you will end up when you begin, nothing has happened in the meantime. You will have to be willing to surprise yourself writing things that you didn’t think you thought. Letting examples
burgeon requires using inattention as a writing tool. You have to let yourself get caught up in the flow of your writing that it ceases at moments to be recognizable to you as your own. This means you have to be prepared for failure. For with inattention comes risk of silliness or even outbreaks of stupidity. But perhaps in order to write experimentally, you have to be willing to ‘affirm’ even your own stupidity. (18)

Massumi asserts that he doesn’t devise a theory and then apply it, since application just alters the object of study and says nothing about the new theory itself; instead, he starts with examples and writes and meditates his way through them. An unorthodox approach to academic writing and research, through experimentation, Massumi thinks against the traditions and beliefs that have bound poststructuralist thought in cultural studies. Thus, for scholars to appropriate any of Massumi’s distinctions or concepts as finite (without questioning or seeing them as provisional, as becomings, as rhetorical), to pull them out of the context of Massumi’s complications, musings, and testings misses his argument all together. Making the affect-emotion distinction, for example, is useful for Massumi to demarcate the terrain of “affect,” a word that means a lot of things to a lot of scholars, but the distinction should also be recognized as an experiment in opening our systems of thought. Massumi says of his experimental writing and the writing in Parables: “The desired result is a systematic openness: an open system” (18). To focus so closely on one aspect of affect (at the expense of the carefully layered context) is to close that system.
The nuanced relationship between affect and emotion becomes even clearer in Massumi’s 2005 article “Fear (The Spectrum Said).” In it, Massumi details how the color-coded terror alert system introduced by George W. Bush’s administration following 9/11 modulated fear in the American public. While people became affectively attuned to fear, they expressed and acted on it in different ways:

The system addressed the population immediately, at a presubjective level: at the level of bodily predisposition or tendency—action in its nascent state ... It was less a communication than an assisted germination of potentials for action whose outcome could not be accurately determined in advance—but whose variable determination could be determined to occur, on hue (33).

Here, Massumi explains how fear emerges on the “presubjective level” of “bodily predisposition tendency.” Massumi references William James’ famous example of fear in which a body reacts to fear before it is consciously aware of it: “We have already begun to experience fear nonconsciously, wrapped in action, before it unfurls from it and it felt as itself, in its distinction from the action with which it arose” (36). So while scholars often point out that the difference between affect and emotion is conscious awareness, here, Massumi suggests that is not always the case. He spends several pages detailing the fear event, which begins with a bodily response: “The experience is in the fear, in its ingathering of action, rather than the fear being the content of an experience. At the starting line, the affect of fear and the action of the body are in a state of indistinction. As the action unfolds, they begin to diverge” (37). The affective intensity continues to grow and
it’s only when the action stops that fear is recognized as a feeling of fear. Fear before this point is just a growing mass of intensity that “ingathers” or germinates potential for action, and it is only when we have a moment to “recollect,” to scan the environment that we take note of the object or cause of our fear. Fear becomes the content of an experience only after the intensity has lowered.

Massumi also makes a form-content distinction in Parables, similarly explaining it in terms of intensity-qualification, which is then mapped onto affect-emotion. But here, we see that an emotion can also be the form or intensity and can occur preconsciously. Fear pauses in what Massumi calls the “stop-beat” (during which the immediate bodily action has ceased and reflection takes place); in this beat, fear turns from intensity to magnitude, and it is no longer lived just through a body but is now compared to other experiences with fear. Massumi’s focus on the stop-beat shows he’s less interested in pulling affect and emotion apart; rather, he’s interested in the exact point of difference, the pause in between: “The separation between direct activation and controlled ideation, or affect in its bodily dimension and emotion as rationalizable subjective content, is a reflective wonderland that does not work this side of the mirror” (40). It’s not so much “difference” as the “between” that intrigues Massumi.

While many have interpreted Massumi’s call to “theorize the difference between affect and emotion” as a call to separate and pull those concepts apart, we could read it as a call to theorize “the difference,” the complex relations between affect and emotion. The complexities of this connection emerge in the way he discusses emotions’ relationship to activation. When the fear event is
encoded in the memory and we gain distance from it, we begin to see emotion as separate from bodily reaction:

To treat the emotion as separable in this way from the activation-event from which it affectively sprang is to place it on the level of representation. It is to treat it, fundamentally and from the start, as a subjective content: basically, an idea. Reduced to the mere idea of itself, it becomes reasonable to suppose that a private subject, in representing it to itself, could hold it and the aleatory outside of its arising as well as the body in live-wire connection with that outside, at a rational, manageable distance. It makes it seem comfortably controllable. (39)

Here, we can see how the narrative quality of emotion refigures affect in recollection. It is the representational aspect of emotion that makes it less powerful than the immediate visceral, affective force. Yet in these examples, emotion is a necessary and important part of the overall emotive-affective experience.

Affect in Rhetoric

Divorcing affect from emotion does more than just take liberties with Massumi’s theories; it also contributes to a number of other assumptions about affect in our field. The divide between affect and emotion extends to how both of those concepts are studied rhetorically. Affect a la Massumi is often discussed as an unnameable force, an ungraspable excess; thus, this affect becomes useful only
in demarcating a dimension we can never access except very indirectly or after the fact. Naming an affect at all—as this story goes—brings it into the realm of signification and suppresses its unique power. And yet, this exemplifies what Edbauer (2005) has called the “false binary between signification and affect,” wherein emotion is stuck in the realm of signification and affect embodies all that transcends it (“(Meta)Physical” 135). If we hold onto this binary, we fail to see that all rhetorical processes involve both affect and signification. The supposed theoretical divide between affect and emotion prevents conversations between scholars who study either concept, as scholars in the field often devote themselves to the pursuit of one over the other. Insofar as pathos has been attached to emotion, it has seemed that studies of affect are incompatible with any rhetorical approach. Even if we accept that Massumi’s definition of affect is more dependent upon emotion than scholars in the field often give it credit for, where does that leave us in regards to affect and rhetoric?

More than just highlighting the role of bodies, Massumi’s description of affective loops is particularly useful in imagining affect as emergent, and co-adapting along with the many actors in a rhetorical situation. Our tendency to accept emotion primarily as representational prevents us from recognizing the organizing properties of emotion: “What we sloppily think of as the idea of an emotion, or the emotion as an idea, is in fact the anticipatory repetition of an affective event, precipitated by the encounter between the body’s irritability and a sign” (“Fear” 40). Because of emotions’ attachment to memory and narrative, we

\[33\] A common theoretical move is to choose one term, “affect” or “emotion,” and to claim that one term is more useful given the project. See, for example, Laura Micciche (2007) pp. 14-16 or Megan Boler (1999) pp. xvi-xvii.
tend to anticipate emotional responses that align with our prior experience. Yet affect has what Clough (2007) calls “self-reflexivity” in which information/communication systems, archiving machines, capital flows, and biopolitical networks are “processes turning back on themselves to act on themselves” (“Introduction” 3). This self-reflexivity helps us understand how emotion emerges. Often when we think of the role of pathos in the rhetorical situation, it is the mark of the beginning and the end, as the rhetor moves the audience from one emotion to another. But understanding the rhetorical situation as self-reflexive or looped allows us to see emotion as pulling forward past emotional experience and fueling future emotional experience. Rather than thinking of rhetorical situations as independent, “new” opportunities for persuasion, a rhetor might pay particular attention to how past emotional experiences shape or set up the audience’s response to pathetic strategies.34

A self-reflexive or looped understanding of affect responds to one of the common critiques of affect—that because it’s preconscious, we have no way to access or control it. Leys (2011), for example, asserts, the “new affect theorists” believe

there is a gap between the subject’s affects and its cognition or appraisal of the affective situation or object, such that cognition or thinking comes ‘too late’ for reasons, beliefs, intentions, and meanings to play the role in action and behavior usually accorded to them. The result is that action and behavior are held to be

34 I’ll explore this in more detail in Chapters Three and Four.
determined by affective dispositions that are independent of consciousness and the mind’s control. (“Turn” 443)

In this account of affect, we are entirely at its mercy, since cognition and planning come too late. However, Leys seems to be describing affect in a linear fashion (echoing others who say, for example, affect comes first, emotion second) that suggests cognitive and affective processes are happening independently. By contrast, Massumi’s articulation of “anticipatory repetition” highlights a system in which history, memory, context, and environment emerge and loop together.

Seeing emotion (and by extension pathos) in terms of loops, networks, or systems allows us to see it beyond the normal confines of cause and/or effect; a repetitive, narrative, self-reflexive, and co-adapting concept of pathos is much more nuanced than the traditional “rhetorical appeal” (seen as a stimulus in search of a response). Following Leys’ critique, we might lament that rhetors cannot anticipate, control, or make use of affect in a rhetorical situation, but we’d be naïve to suggest that rhetors have ever had much overt control over the emotions. While networks and systems are complex, they are not random; in order to hold their structure, repetition and patterns emerge (of course, networks and loops break down, but another or others emerge to take its place). Paying attention to affective loops and networks is one way to access and harness affect rhetorically; the AIDS activists Edbauer Rice described, for example, were able to intervene in and reroute the affective loops surrounding the public discourse on AIDS.

Of course, tracing and anticipating the affective loops in a rhetorical situation is no easy task. Perhaps Massumi’s theory of affect might be best
integrated in the field as it usually is—as part of invention. After all, his theory is based on Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) assertion that “Affects are becomings” (*Thousand 256*). Following this sentiment, several scholars have begun to reshape theories of invention with affect theory. But we’d be remiss to think that Massumi’s is the only theory of affect worth considering in our field. As I’ll illustrate in the following section, Fredric Jameson’s theory of affect has the potential to help us better explicate a looped or reflexive nature of the rhetorical situation.

**The Waning of Affect: Another Approach**

Following his famous claim in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1990) about the “waning of affect” in the postmodern era, Jameson goes on to define affects as “free-floating and impersonal” (16). Because Jameson asserts we are no longer “centered subjects”—postmodernism is the end of the “bourgeois ego” or “monad”—affects don’t belong to us but are external and embedded in cultural practices and values (15). They circulate like capital through mediated contact. Jameson’s theory of affect, of course, grows out of the Frankfurt School’s critiques that technologies of mass production and postmodern aesthetics in general contribute to a culture industry that

---

35 Thomas Rickert (2007), for example, explores affect’s role in invention through Plato’s concept chora—what he considered “the matrix of all becoming.” Rather than thinking of rhetorical concepts as clear and distinct, in this paradigm, mind, body, and environment are fused: “minds are both embodied, and hence grounded in emotion and sensation, and dispersed into the environment itself, and hence no longer autonomous” (251). Thus, invention is immersed in and springs from any confluence of forces. See also Holding (2007), Hawk (2007), Davis (2010) for discussions of affect and invention.
fundamentally alters the affective resonances of art and our perceptions of it. For example, he compares Vincent Van Gogh's “A Pair of Boots” (1887) with Andy Warhol's “Diamond Dust Shoes” (1980), saying that a viewer can imagine when viewing Van Gough’s weathered, beaten, loosely-tied boots what the leather would feel like, how it would feel to put them on and walk around in them. You imagine their history, where they’ve been, and where they might be going. In contrast, Warhol’s screen-printed representation of monochromatic shoes appears flat; there’s a lack of visual depth to the shoes that are juxtaposed against a black background. A viewer can’t imagine the shoes’ history or putting them on, and the medium of screen-printing makes Warhol’s piece easy to duplicate; it’s not unique. This marks:

the end, for example, of style, in the sense of the unique and the personal, the end of the distinctive brushstroke (as symbolized by the emergent primacy of mechanical reproduction). As for expression and feelings or emotions, the liberation, in contemporary society from the older anomie of the centered subject may also mean not merely a liberation from anxiety but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self to do the feeling. (Jameson 15)

Jameson asserts that affectively and emotionally we’ve traded depth for intensity, history for fleeting ecstasy. Affective experiences in the postmodern age are
reproduced; we seek out synthetically created affective experience through mass produced media, advertising, even drug use. Just like the reproduction of brushstrokes in a mass produced piece of art, our feelings, our emotions are no longer unique, personal, or subjective. For Jameson, the waning of affect is also a waning of emotions, and he describes a kind of affective background, in which many of us are unknowing participants. Affects are not becomings for Jameson; they already exist in our time. Affects are structurally imbedded in our media, art, and culture, which seep into our moods, feelings, and dispositions.

Jameson’s theory of affect has been primarily used in the field to discuss how we are culturally schooled in emotion. Worsham (1998) suggests “the pedagogy of postmodernism offers an extreme version of the dumb view of emotion, where emotion no longer can have any appropriate objects, aims, or interests” (“Going” 229). The dumb view, which she borrows from Elizabeth Spellman, “silences emotion—restricts emotion to the realm of the body (to sensation, physical feelings, and involuntary bodily movements) where it remains a purely private and internal event” (224). Worsham and Jameson point to a generation of people who seek out intense, artificial emotions—a trend especially evident in the increase in prescription or illegal drug use. People are chasing what Jameson calls “a peculiar kind of euphoria” (16).

Since the waning of affect is something that we’ve historically and culturally inherited, it might seem that we can have little influence on it rhetorically as affects seem somewhat imposed on us. But as several scholars in

---

36 We might be reminded here of Walter Benjamin’s “Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” or Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s critique of the culture industry in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.
the field have shown, we can and should respond to (in our teaching) this less or differently affected era in which we live, in order to address, for example, what Worsham calls the hidden curriculum of emotion (“Grief, hatred, bitterness, anger, rage, terror, and apathy as well as emotions of self-assessment such as pride, guilt, and shame” (“Going” 216)), what Thomas Rickert (2007) calls “the climate of resignation” (Acts 191), or what Johnson (2001) identifies as “student rage” (“School” 624). Acknowledging the impact of the affective milieu of our era might help explain and reframe some of the resistant behavior we see in our classrooms and in our students. In a reading of David Bartholomae’s infamous Quentin essay, for example, Rickert (2001) asserts that Quentin’s response might be better characterized as “transgressive,” a refusal to communicate in ways sanctioned by the university. In refusing to address the assignment or the imagined rubric, Quentin subverts academic expectations and conventions and performs what Rickert says is an “act”–not merely a writing assignment (“Hands” 310). What some call “violence” in our classrooms, mostly in the form of aggressive or resistant writing, might actually reflect some of the difficulties contemporary students face when they try to express emotions in a culture that has discouraged personal, unique emotional and affective experiences.

Jameson’s theory has untapped potential for theorizing emotions and affects in a rhetorical situation that is looped, self-reflexive, or generally more

37 Bartholomae describes a student he calls “Quentin” in “The Tidy House: Basic Writing in the American Curriculum” who wrote what some might consider vitriolic responses to writing prompts. For example, in response to the prompt, “If existence precedes essence, what is man?” Quentin wrote: “About man and good and evil I don’t care about this shit fuck this shit, trash, and should be put in the trash can with this shit” (6).
complicated. Emotions and affects are frequently understood to be bound up with exigences in rhetoric—what incites or impels a rhetorical situation. The audience’s emotions toward the event at hand are the impetus for the rhetor’s argument, following Bitzer’s (1968) definition of exigence as “an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be” (6). By this understanding, emotions seem to mark the beginning and end of a rhetorical situation, as the beginning emotion is an “imperfection” and the end emotion is no longer “waiting to be done.” However, this role for emotions isn’t very nuanced; we know emotions play a larger role than being bookends to the rhetorical situation. In fact, emotions and affects also align with Bitzer’s list of common constraints: “beliefs, attitudes, documents, facts, traditions, images, interests, motives” (8). The emotional and affective attachments of the individual—which grow out of Jameson’s culturally embedded affective background—also contain the rhetorical possibilities of the situation.

As both exigences and constraints, affects and emotions both incite and contain the situation; they both drive and restrict its possibilities. As such, we can see how one emotion can be both an exigence and constraint, and how an emotion can be an exigence for one rhetorical situation and a constraint in another. For example, we could take Rickert’s “climate of resignation” in the classroom not just as a “something waiting to be done,” the impetus for a new pedagogy, but also as a constraint we have to work with, within, and against.

38 We can see this especially in how frequently affect and emotion are considered in terms of invention.
Taking what we might usually consider an affective exigence as a constraint broadens our understanding of the rhetorical situation, acknowledging that the rhetorical situation is recursive—its constituents always transforming and folding into each other. If we consider the rhetorical situation surrounding Jameson’s argument in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* as an example, we can see how the dulling of the affects and emotions in our era embodies both an obstacle to be overcome but also an attitude or feeling that limits the possible outcomes of his argument, possible ways of imagining how things might be otherwise. In this way, affect recursively fuels more complicated kinds of invention,\textsuperscript{39} as we see new issues and exigences coming to the fore.

This kind of affective looping is especially useful in theorizing complex rhetorical events that encompass what traditionally might have seemed to be multiple rhetorical situations. For example, the pervasive fear surrounding the LeRoy case was a constraint that prevented the girls from initially accepting their diagnosis (doctors were unable to persuade them of a diagnosis), but that same fear is an exigence for the news media to shape their stories about the “mystery illness”—to persuade the girls of other possible causes and to persuade the public audience that this story is significant. A revised theory of pathos invoking this understanding of affect would consider more carefully emotional exigences and

\textsuperscript{39} Several scholars in the field have made arguments for more complex theories of invention. For example, Anis Bawarshi (2001) suggests, “invention is less an inspired mysterious activity and more a location and mode of inquiry, a way of positioning oneself in relation to a problem and a way of working through it” (6). Debra Hawhee makes a similar claim, asserting that just as the rhetorical subject invents an encounter, the encounter invents the rhetorical subject. She calls this kind of process “invention-in-the-middle,” which “assumes that rhetoric is a performance, a discursive-material-bodily-temporal encounter, a force among forces” (24).
constraints—and more importantly their recursitvity, how they relate to one another, and how they fuel overlapping situations.

But the work of *pathos* in rhetoric is more than just reading exigences and constraints. It’s also about understanding (in a Burkean sense) the motivations of the audience and their emotional attachments. Similar to Massumi, Jameson says that affects are free-floating and impersonal, thus these theories of affect don’t help us imagine how to tap into the motivations of the individual. However, a brief look at the Jacques Lacan’s concept of desire better explicates how we personally experience and make affective investments.

**The Desiring Subject**

The psychoanalytic tradition—and its take on affect—is another influence on the field, as we can see in the work of, for example, Susan Wells (1996), Marshall Alcorn (2002), Christa Albrecht-Crane (2003), and Christian Lundberg (2012). Rickert (2007) asserts, “Psychoanalytic theory provides an early but quite sophisticated attempt to theorize how affective factors structure communication in ways that we are only partially aware of at any given moment” (*Acts 35*). Because we know audiences have affective investments, it would seem that figuring out what drives those investments—where they come from, how they are formed, and thus might be changed—might help us better explicate how, if *pathos* is concerned with motivation (with moving an audience emotionally), we can better identify and respond to affective investments rhetorically.
In addition to “affect,” psychoanalysis makes use of several other key terms, including desire, enjoyment, pleasure, and emotion. Since explicating the differences among these terms would be a dissertation in itself, I’ll focus on Lacan’s concept of “desire” here because it seems most useful in uncovering rhetorical, affective motivations. A look at desire further allows us to consider not just what affect is but what it does rhetorically. Lacan’s concept of desire is especially interesting in thinking about how the subject desires to identify with (to be) the other.

On the most fundamental level, desire, Lacan asserts throughout his Écrits, is the desire for the other. We desire mimetically: both what the other desires but also to be the other, meaning that desire stems from identifying with the other. During entrance into the symbolic order (for Lacan, the mirror stage), the subject experiences lack (when the infant realizes its needs will not always be met) and this produces desire, which will never be entirely fulfilled. The symbolic order positions us and our desiring; thus, our desires and affective investments are not so much our own as the desires and investments of others. Lacan’s theory of desire is an incredibly complicated phenomenon, but through just this brief look we can see the implications of desire in Burke’s (1969) theory of identification, in which “you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his” (55). All of those gestures, tones, and attitudes are tied up in

---

40 Because “desire” isn’t a key concept in this dissertation, it may seem odd that I focus on it here. Given more time, I would more carefully integrate and explicate this section. However, I think it’s worth taking at least a cursory look at “desire,” since it offers another account of how we become affectively engaged with rhetoric.
any number of symbolic orders in which the rhetor and audience is a part. The rhetor doesn’t just desire to persuade the other; she also desires the other, identifies with the other. This suggests that identification is not just one avenue for persuasion; it’s a necessary avenue for persuasion, a primary mode of functioning in the world. Wells (1996) describes Lacan’s theory of desire in narrative terms:

the distance of the desiring subject from the object in which he or she is constitutes incites a swerve toward the object of desire, a motion which never culminates in triumphant arrival. Desire has to do with the unconscious, with what is radically beyond direct knowledge, manifesting itself instead in the perturbations of daily activity, in unguarded and accidental performances, and in dreams (81).

As Wells points out, the Lacanian understanding of desire is propelled by lack, of constantly trying to fulfill an insatiable desire. But this desire isn’t something the subject experiences in isolation; desire is what pulls the subject into collectives and compels the subject to identify with particular groups.

Sara Ahmed (2004) describes this circular process of lack and desire through the metaphor of “affective economy,” wherein desire is similar to demand and emotion is akin to capital. She explains that emotions circulate among signifiers rather than actually residing in the subject or in the object of an emotion. Ahmed analyzes an excerpt from the Aryan Nation’s website which continually attaches feelings of fear, disgust, and rage to the signifiers of nonwhite people (immigrants, interracial couples, those incarcerated, etc.) and
attaches feelings of love and purity to “white.” Emotions, she says align people with communities: “Rather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective” (“Affective” 119). Ahmed asserts emotions make people “adhere” and “cohere” together. Unlike the ways Massumi and Jameson describe affects as impersonal, the metaphor of the affective economy encourages us to see affects as deeply personal but fundamentally attached to the desires and affective investments of others. Ahmed describes,

This is what I would call the rippling effect of emotions; they move sideways (through ‘sticky’ associations between signs, figures, and objects) as well as backward (repression always leaves its trace in the present—hence ‘what sticks’ is also bound up with the ‘absent presence’ of historicity). (120)

This sort of affective economy is useful in better understanding the emotions and affects that are attributed to and accepted by the collective of the girls in LeRoy. The historical connotations (weak, vulnerable, out of control) attached to “hysteria” would seem to discourage the girls from wanting to join the group. However, as I’ll detail more in my final chapter, some reports of the case suggest several of the girls’ desired to identify with the collective. Through the development of tics and verbal outbursts (through identification with the afflicted girls, desiring the girls themselves), the girls joined (became grouped with) the collective of hysterical girls.
These last two sections on Jameson and Lacan reveal alternate avenues for identifying affect, through analysis of the art, media, and discourse of an era or through the study of desire and affective economies. Unlike the common conception of affect in the field—that it is the unidentifiable—these theories bring affect into language without squelching its power. The question that has dominated considerations of affect in our field is what is affect? In the way that Massumi is often taken up, the answer to this question has been assumed (affects are bodily intensities responsible for invention). Turning to other theories, however, can help us define affect differently (e.g., as structural, in exigence, constraint, desire, identification, economy), extending our understandings of the many ways affect infuses rhetoric.

The Current State of Affect

Though “affect” is now accepted within the field’s general vocabulary, it is frequently used only to qualify other rhetorical objects. Affect is often used to describe an abstract, fleeting, or bodily dimension (for example, “affective response” “affective stance,” “affective encounter,” or “affective capacity”\(^1\)). While affect in these scenarios suggests an expansion of our rhetorical scope, it has no function beyond modifying other actions or dimensions. Invoking affect only in this way inhibits our understandings, as it appears that affect’s only rhetorical use is signaling an abstract dimension, and thus prevents us from

engaging the living whole of the rhetorical situation or a situation, lived rhetorically. This contributes to a tenor in the field that both Edbauer (2005) and Albrecht-Crane (2003) have written about, in which the turn to affect is gloriously celebrated or completely dismissed as another unpractical high-theory movement. As Edbauer illustrates through an examination of messages on the WPA listserv: “a conversation about composition and affect turned into a critique of what was seen as impractical theory-talk” (“(Meta)Physical” 135). The way scholars have often seen affect as lying outside the signifying practice of writing reflects a “fundamental misunderstanding of the affective dimension” because writing is nothing if not the interplay of affect and signification (135-6). In the eight years since Edbauer made that claim, “affect” has become much more widely used in the field and scholars seem more willing to accept the affective elements of writing. Yet rather than pursuing affect’s many rhetorical functions, most scholars still use the term in service of other rhetorical projects.

The question remains then: what does rhetoric need from a theory of affect? It seems we need something between an autonomous and fragmented subject, between full and impossible communication, between conscious intention and randomness, between pushing the limits of the linguistic and abandoning it, between purely logical, cognitive, rational persuasion and the dissipation of persuasion across networks and systems. A theory of affect for rhetoric needs to oscillate between order and chaos—the very definition of complexity. As I hope to illustrate in the following chapter, the pull between the rhetorical tradition (a tradition that sometimes feels too fixed) and affect theory (a theory that often seems too ambiguous) can be a productive one. To better
understand the role of affect in rhetoric and how we might use it to revise theories of *pathos*, we need to understand the role affect plays in defining rhetorical projects, in the progression (and sustaining) of rhetorical situations/events, and in delineating the rhetorical functions (affects) of the many bodies that make up complex rhetorical events. The following chapter attempts to outline these very roles of affect in rhetoric.
Chapter Three

Persuasive Bodies, Phantom Rhetorics:
A Theoretical Framework

I certainly wasn’t fantasizing the deep ache in what had been my right hand. Sometimes I felt as if my fist was clamping tighter and tighter until my fingers were ready to explode. The pain brought back memories of that horrible night in the Humvee. In those moments, my hand felt as if it were cupped around a hot object, burning and throbbing as it did after the explosion. At other times, the Phantom could create the sensation of twisted fingers or a bent thumb. Sometimes, it was an annoying tickle on the heel of my hand.
--Michael Weisskopf, Blood Brothers: Among the Soldiers of Ward 57

The pain was like nothing I had ever known—it was as strange and strong and foreign as a terrified scream in a voice you don’t recognize. The ache was painful, yet it was beyond pain: It was the hollow feeling of loss—physical, yes, but a more whole body feeling, as if a cave had been gouged deep in my leg somewhere, and air was blowing—howling—through it. It was like the pain of nostalgia—vague but omnipresent, attached to everything but nothing in particular. The sensation of complete loss.
--Emily Rapp, Poster Child: A Memoir

The phantom limb, if not existing in bone, tendons, and tissue, exists affectively. While the limb appears absent, the pain of the phantom limb is very
much present, as the epigraphs above suggest. The phantom, an affect, is caught between presence and absence. It can feel, it can be touched, but it can’t be located. It’s familiar yet foreign, of and not of one’s own body. As both Weisskopf, a TIME correspondent who lost his hand in a bombing in Iraq, and Rapp, whose leg was amputated because of a congenital birth defect, attest, the phantom is fused with memories, longings, feelings of wholeness. It is a fascinating example of bodies’ rhetoric, as the phantom seemingly persuades the amputee and others of its presence. To carry out the claims of my introduction, I want to imagine processes that have previously been explained (or dismissed) as biological, neurological, or chemical as rhetorical. The phantom limb, like I’ll suggest about mass hysteria, can be studied rhetorically, and uncovering these phantom rhetorics requires a closer look at how we understand materiality. I begin this chapter with the phantom limb because it exposes common ways of theorizing bodies, for example, making fixed distinctions between what is and is not of a body, clinging to an idea of a whole body, and defining bodies by what is materially present. The phantom limb is a powerful metaphor that highlights the affects of bodies that are not materially present—invisible bodies that continue to persuade.

Physicians and philosophers have long theorized about phantom limbs. One of the earliest to write about the phenomenon was 16th century surgeon Ambrose Pare who called it a “false and deceitful sense” (457). Descartes in

---

42 Rhetoric scholars have, of course, begun to consider such approaches, most notably in the rhetoric of science and in neurorhetorics (see the neurorhetorics special issue of RSQ). Yet I want to distinguish my project from studying science rhetorically; rather, I seek to study the rhetoricity of bodily phenomena.
Meditation VI uses phantom pain as an example to illustrate how pain is felt in the soul, present in the brain. Often attributed with coining “phantom limb,” physician Silas Weir Mitchell (who also happened to be Charlotte Perkins Gillman’s doctor) wrote in 1871 that “A person in this condition is haunted, as it were, by a constant or inconstant fractional phantom of so much of himself as had been lopped away—an unseen ghost of the lost part” (565). A common explanation of phantom pain is that it’s the brain’s way of dealing with the loss of a body part; as if in mourning, the brain continues attempting to reach out to the missing limb, trying to persuade the body of its wholeness. As Elizabeth Grosz explains, “The phantom is an expression of nostalgia for the unity and wholeness of the body, its completion. It is a memorial to the missing limb, a psychical delegate that stands in its place” (73). The body’s equilibrium is disturbed, neurologist and psychoanalyst Paul Schilder asserts, because “[w]e are accustomed to have a complete body. The phantom of the amputee person is therefore a reactivation of a given perceptive pattern by emotional forces” (qtd. in Grosz 73). The desire for the “complete” and “whole” body has permeated theories about the phantom limb for centuries. In recent years, neurologists\(^{43}\) have theorized that phantom pain is caused by maladaptive cortical reorganization, plasticity, or remapping, meaning that after the loss of a limb, the brain continues to send signals to the missing body part, but another body part picks up the signals, causing a reorganization of the body’s sensory map. The brain, then, makes up for the loss by remapping the body into a new “whole.”

\(^{43}\) See, for example, Elena Nava and Brigitte Röder (2011) or Sylvia Gustin et al. (2012).
Additionally, therapy for amputees often involves the mirror; in a distorted version of Lacan’s “mirror stage,” amputees are asked to study themselves in a mirror, to visually reckon with the amputation.44 Both dominant theories and therapies are based on the assumption that amputated bodies are not whole, that the phantom limb does not exist because it’s not materially present.

These considerations of existence and reality, of course, quickly become philosophical, as perception plays an important role in what we take to be “real.” The phantom is stuck in Merleau-Ponty’s perceptual “paradox of immanence and transcendence”; the phantom is immanent “because the perceived object cannot be foreign to him who perceives” and transcendent “because it always contains something more than what is actually given” (“Primacy” 16). The phantom is invariably “more than,” as its pain has no clear origin. While we could easily concede that the phantom is real insofar as it is perceived, a recent groundbreaking study suggests it may have more material resonances than once thought. Tamar Makin et al.’s 2013 study reveals that when amputees who have phantom pain were told to move their phantom limbs, they had the same brain activity as those moving intact limbs; the amputees have a persisting representation of the missing limbs in their brains. This study suggests that the limb, while not visibly present, is still materially present in the brain. These results cause us to question the correlation between presence and visibility or at least to refine/redefine what we mean by “presence.”

44 Mirror box therapy is also a common treatment for phantom pain. A mirror is used to reflect the image of an intact limb onto the space of the missing limb so that the amputee visualizes himself or herself as whole.
Rather than reading the brain's desire for wholeness as a response to the exigence of amputation, we have to acknowledge that the amputee body is still in some sense whole, that it never registered the loss of the limb because the limb was never (completely) lost. When we insist on theorizing bodies as complete wholes, we risk assigning it false (rhetorical) intentions. Deleuze and Guatarri assert:

We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body. (*Thousand 257*)

We cannot know the phantom until we know its affects, how it composes and decomposes bodies and affects. As the epigraphs illustrate, the phantom destroys, and sometimes with the right treatment, can be destroyed.

More than asking how our assumptions about wholeness and bodies affect the way we understand the rhetoricity of bodies, I want to propose that we expand our notion of materiality to include those things that are affectively present. Following Rickert's call for a more sophisticated study of affect in *Ambient Rhetoric*, I suggest we resist theorizing affect and matter as somehow antithetical (matter is seen, touched, and used; affect is not). Rickert asserts:

*[O]ur concept of the material world and our relation to it must shift as well. Affect, materiality, embodiment, world—these all go together. Rhetorical theory’s grounding in humanism, particularly*
its lingering Cartesian assumptions of a subject/object, mind/world dichotomy, implicitly blocks this insight and impedes revision of many of our key concepts. (21)

The key concept of this dissertation—pathos—has long fallen victim to Cartesian assumptions, and despite many advances in emotion and affect scholarship, pathos is still often considered to be logos’ fickle counterpart. A central obstacle to this revision is the inability thus far to reconcile or integrate advances in affect theory with existing rhetorical theories of pathos. Thus, this chapter puts forth a framework to better study affect rhetorically, which I propose hinges on considerations of materiality.

Ways of understanding, describing, and theorizing bodies have a direct impact on how we theorize the rhetoricity of bodies and their relations to affect—not as just ephemeral, pervasive, invisible, but as something that assembles and gathers matter. To see affect and bodies in this way, I suggest in this chapter that we adopt a Spinozist view of bodies: not defined by form, function, substance, or as subject. Rather Deleuze, in his work on Spinoza, asserts “it is the relations of motion and rest, speeds and slowness” and “the capacity for affecting and being affected” that define a body in its individuality (Spinoza 123). “Body” here, of course, extends beyond the human and animal to include any gathering of parts. So the phantom limb, because of its capacity to affect and be affected, is a body, not only emerging from its biological origins but also entwining with other bodies (doctors, mirror boxes, changes in the weather that bring it pain, etc.). Affect is central to Spinoza’s theory of bodies, and his notion of affect can help us negotiate the line between underdetermination and oversimplification of affect in
rhetorical theory. Likewise, defining bodies by their affects—by their rhetorical affects and functions—opens opportunities for applying rhetorical theories to complex rhetorical events.

Toward a rhetorical theory of affect, I’ll argue in this chapter that looking at ontological approaches to rhetorical study reveals the enmeshment of affect and matter. After a consideration of what it means to study rhetoric ontologically, I turn to an example of how a theory of “fire objects” is useful for investigating complex rhetorical events with many emotional and affective influences. Then, I suggest we return to a notion of affect as assembling, specifically with a better understanding of Deleuze and Guattari’s assemblage theory. Rather than studying affect primarily as a bodily or abstract dimension of something else, returning to an understanding of affect as assembling highlights the rhetorical work of affect. Finally, I suggest that Spinoza’s theory of bodies places affect at the center of the emergence of material and rhetorical bodies—specifically the rhetorical relations of human and nonhuman bodies in complex rhetorical events.

Rhetoric and Ontology

Studying an event like the one in LeRoy is not an easy rhetorical task. More than just trying to untangle the many variables, forces, and motivations that drive the outcomes of the event, one must first back up and try to determine what exactly to study. As an object of study, mass hysteria could be understood as a clinical diagnosis, as a confluence of symptoms, as inspired by historical and cultural understandings, etc. What is more, when attempting to mark out the
boundaries of mass hysteria, it may suddenly seem to cease to be an object at all. Mass hysteria has no clear beginning or end; it extends and mutates seemingly infinitely. In rhetoric, we often don’t talk about our projects as objects. Compared to discourse, language, media, and texts, objects seem static, discrete. Studying objects has often been the domain of science and philosophy, but a growing body of scholarship suggests that ontology offers a unique perspective for rhetorical study.

Ontological approaches in rhetoric have garnered renewed interest in the last several years, as packed audiences at the 2010 and 2012 RSAs and the 2012 CCCC panels on object-oriented, complexity, and Latourian theories illustrate. As a discipline historically concerned with the human rhetor and student writer, a heightened interest in objects, materiality, and networks may seem surprising. But it is the very turn away from theorizing the human as the fulcrum of a rhetorical act that seems to invigorate this scholarship for rhetorical study. Rhetoricians who’ve been presenting and beginning to publish in this vein (Cooper, Hawk, Rickert, Barnett, Rivers) aim to decenter the human rhetor within rhetorical acts; understand the rhetorical act more as an occasion materializing within, among, and aligned with other always, on-going occasions; expand our understanding of persuasion, such that nonhuman things, too, can persuade; and question assumptions about rhetoric by asking what it would mean to have a rhetoric of objects. These scholars have elucidated how studying rhetoric ontologically changes our understanding of how rhetoric comes into being and humans’ role(s) in that becoming. However, despite a number of rhetorical inquiries into objects, networks, and nonhumans in the last decade, it’s
not yet clear how capacities that have often been thought to be uniquely human/animal—sensing, feeling, emoting—fit into object-oriented, materialist, or complex rhetorical theories.

Affect, because it is not unique to humans, is in a prime position to transcend boundaries between humans and nonhumans, subjects and objects. Jane Bennett writes in *Vibrant Matter*:

> Over the past decade or so, many political theorists, geographers, art historians, philosophers, sociologists, dancers, literary theorists, and others have explored the contributions made by affect to public culture, whereby affect refers to how moods and aesthetic sensibilities influence ethics and politics as much as do words, arguments, and reasons. While I agree that human affect is a key player, in this book the focus is on an affect that is not only not fully susceptible to rational analysis or linguistic representation but that is also not specific to humans, organisms or even to bodies: the affect of technologies, winds, vegetables, minerals. (61)

For rhetoric, what this means is expanding not only our understanding of how affect gathers matter, things, humans, and objects, but also extending theories of *pathos* to include considerations of objects and matter. Before imagining what it might mean for an object to use or intersect with *pathos*, I’ll consider more closely what ontological studies in rhetoric might look like.
One of the most recent and popular strands of this scholarship is object-oriented ontology (OOO),
coined in philosopher Graham Harman’s 1999 dissertation. “OOO,” as its commonly referred to, responds to poststructuralist
and linguistic philosophies that ignore objects or describe them as secondary to humans or human experience; in OOO, by contrast, humans and nonhumans are ontologically equal. Since OOO has taken off, several conference panels and blog posts have been dedicated to musings on object-oriented rhetoric (OOR). Jim Brown’s review of the 2010 RSA panel “Toward an Object-Oriented Rhetoric, or What Happens When the Human is No Longer the Center of Rhetoric?” incited a number of blog responses from central OOO theorists. In a response to Brown’s review, philosopher Levi Bryant asserts the main claim of OOR would be that not just humans—but also nonhuman objects—persuade. Similarly intrigued by the possibilities of OOR, another prominent OOO scholar and computer programmer Ian Bogost suggests, “We might also ask a different question under the name of object-oriented rhetoric: what is the rhetoric of objects? Do things like traffic lights and kohlrabis persuade one another in their interactions? What would it mean to understand extra-human object relations as rhetorical?” These are provocative questions to say the least and in some ways they mirror some of my own, yet OOO/R because of its ties to Latour, actor-network theory, and complexity theory, is much more interested in the functioning of technological

---

45 Though OOO scholars mark several distinctions between it and previous ontologies or ontological projects, OOO is often included under the umbrella of speculative realism or lumped in with new materialism and new vitalism.
46 The most substantial consideration of this is Scott Barnett’s “Toward an Object-Oriented Rhetoric,” a review of Harman’s book and then subsequent responses to that review.
and natural-cultural systems than in consciousness, sensations, or feelings. OOR scholarship doesn’t yet explain if or how central rhetorical concepts might be mapped onto an object’s rhetoric. It’s unclear for instance how pathos would exist in OOR. But a closely related vein of scholarship that emerges more from a Spinozist-Deleuzian tradition—new materialist theory—better accounts for the roles that affects and emotions play or can play in rhetoric.

In new materialist theory, affect is part of the becoming of matter and what matters; it can help us better imagine how pathos fits into materialist, object-oriented, complex rhetorics. A true revision of pathos, using affect theory, must extend beyond the human, linguistic, and discursive. Though rhetoricians have only just begun to publish in this vein, it’s a growing area of interdisciplinary scholarship. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost explain the main tenets of new materialism in their introduction to the 2010 anthology *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*:

In sum, new materialists are rediscovering a materiality that materializes, evincing immanent modes of self-transformation that compel us to think of causation in far more complex terms; to recognize that phenomena are caught in a multitude of interlocking systems and forces and to consider anew the location and nature of capacitates for agency. (9)

Mirroring Massumi’s argument for augmenting rather than critiquing, a new materialist approach is interested in production, in thinking our way around

---

47 Scholars in rhetoric have begun to identify with this scholarship only in the last few years. Many of them also study OOO/R. Rickert’s (2013) and Hawk’s (2007) works are preeminent examples of a new materialist rhetoric.
humanist assumptions about the world: “It avoids dualism or dialectical reconciliation by espousing a monological account of emergent, generative material being” (8). Coole and Frost assert that a new materialist ethos is “positive and constructive”; rather than concerning themselves with a critique or a dismissal of Cartesianism, new materialists attempt to think beyond it. In the “material turn,” matter becomes vibrant, active, resistant, productive. Coole and Frost mark Einstein’s theory of relativity as a transition from theorizing matter as inert and immobile unless acted upon (inspired by Euclidean geometry and Newtonian physics) to theorizing matter and force as inseparable. In this transition, rather than explaining cause and effect by the classic billiard ball example, in which both cause and effect are easily identifiable, causes and effects become more difficult or impossible to pull apart.

Despite much enthusiasm for the potentials of OOO and new materialist scholarship, there is no shortage of concern about invoking these theories in rhetoric. Two central concerns emerge for scholars who see rhetoric as a human enterprise: 1) extending rhetorical study infinitely outward to encompass the study of any thing makes rhetoric lose its distinctiveness and power, and 2) if we give objects agency, we take agency and control away from humans. These concerns reflect two already, ongoing debates in rhetoric about Big Rhetoric and agency. Here, I’ll briefly respond to each of these concerns in hopes of complicating existing conceptions of what it means to pursue new materialist theory in rhetoric.

Some argue if rhetoric is no longer a human enterprise interested in public discourse and persuasion, it’s no longer rhetoric. This claim echoes the Big
Rhetoric debate of the ‘90s, when scholars like Thomas Farrell, Dalip Parameshwar Goankar, and Lloyd Bitzer responded to the popularization and expansion of rhetorical studies. The oft-cited quote from *Rhetorical Hermeneutics* by William Keith, Steve Fuller, Alan Gross, and Michael Leff captures the critique of Big Rhetoric: “If everything is rhetoric/rhetorical, then it is neither informative nor interesting [to] be told that a practice/discourse/institution is rhetorical. *si omnia, nulla*” (1999, 331). “If [rhetoric is] everything, [rhetoric is] nothing”. Underlying much of this critique is the idea that rhetoric, born from the desires of the human rhetor, simply isn’t equipped to and shouldn’t be concerned with studying phenomena that is extra-discursive or extra-linguistic. This reflects the idea that persuasion are a uniquely human capacity. But this critique also reflects a disciplinary insecurity, as Edward Schiappa suggests in “Second Thoughts on the Critiques of Big Rhetoric.” There, he outlines the critique of Big Rhetoric in this way: “1. Definitional—If rhetoric is everywhere, it is nowhere. 2. Evaluative—Big Rhetoric contributes to weak scholarship. 3. Political—Without a clear disciplinary history and discrete identity, the discipline of rhetoric is threatened” (267). Rather than seeing the popularization of rhetoric as a threat, Schiappa suggests we see it as an opportunity: “What is significant about the rhetorical turn is not that ‘everything is rhetoric,’ but that a rhetorical perspective and vocabulary potentially can be used to understand and describe a wide range of phenomena” (268). A new materialist rhetoric is an opportunity to shed light on a variety of phenomena but perhaps more importantly to question and extend existing rhetorical theories and applications.
Rather than assuming that humans are the producers of rhetoric, we might see humans as being folded into rhetoric. As both Davis and Rickert have suggested, rhetoricity precedes us. Our task, then, is not to ask what is rhetoric; it is not, we know, one thing. Rather we are left to carve out rhetorical projects, to figure out what we can interpret as rhetorical in any phenomenon and what that process might teach us about what rhetoric can be. Hawk’s *Counter-History of Composition* takes up this sort of investigation, both extending traditional boundaries of rhetoric and illustrating how a counter-history inspires us to ask questions about long-standing rhetorical theories. He argues, “The seemingly simple, static logic of the enthymeme and the abstract power of language over us need to give way to a more complex middle ground” (187). A complex vitalist perspective, he suggests, reveals rhetoric as a self-organizing complex adaptive system, wherein the human subject is a node in a network, not rhetoric’s orchestrator. Hawk asserts that a closer look at our history shows a tradition of valuing complex relationships among minds bodies, and environments, relating, for example, Aristotle’s entelechy to an ecological, layered process of development. If we accept that humans are no longer the orchestrators of rhetoric, this means paying attention to how affects and emotions are produced and transmitted by nonhumans, as Hawk asserts, “any understanding of rhetoric in the contemporary world needs to understand rhetoric at the level of affect. Like language, new media make new affections and new relations possible” (190). Affect theory is an avenue for humanistic rhetorical traditions to be merged with recent studies of objects, matter, or the nonhuman.
Another popular critique of ontologically focused theories in rhetoric is that they take away agency from humans. However, a number of theorists have made compelling arguments that our understanding of human agency has been flawed all along. Bennett addresses just this “The Agency of Assemblages.” She argues that human-centered notions of agency are inadequate. In her scheme, assemblages are made up of groupings of actants, some of which, she suggests, have sufficient coherence to appear as entities; others, because of their great volatility, fast pace or evolution, or minuteness of scale, are best conceived as forces [...] Within this materialism, the world is figured as neither mechanistic nor teleological but rather as alive with movement and with a certain power of expression. (447)

The problem, she says, with popular conceptions of agency is that they celebrate human intentionality and a presumed superiority; it is centered around “the rational, intentional human subject” (453). A phenomenological approach, by contrast, as inspired by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, recognizes the embodiment and intersubjectivity of all human actants. Bennett offers what she calls “a distributive theory of agency,” which does not ignore the human ability to reflect and make judgments but she asserts:

[I]t attempts a more radical displacement of the human subject from the center of thinking about agency. It goes so far as to say that effective agency is always an assemblage: even what has been considered the purest locus of agency—reflective, intentional human consciousness—is from the first moment of its emergence
constituted by the interplay of human and nonhuman materialities.

(453)

This doesn’t mean that humans no longer have agency (as some critics have suggested) but rather that we must acknowledge the nonhuman aspects of human agency; a human agent never makes a choice without other materialities.

Within our own field, Marilyn Cooper takes up Bennett’s theory of agency, in her article “Rhetorical Agency As Emergent and Enacted.” Cooper, too, criticizes a popular understanding of agency as conscious intention and free will. Instead, she suggests, “though the world changes in response to individual action, agents are very often not aware of their intentions, they do not directly cause changes, and the choices they make are not free from influence from their inheritance, past experiences or their surround” (421). Cooper urges that we see agency as “an emergent property of embodied individuals” (421). Even though agents plan and reflect on their actions consciously and while this consciousness plays a role, Cooper claims this agency is based in “individuals’ lived knowledge that their actions are their own” (421). We often attribute our actions and words simply to conscious choices that we made rather than considering the agency also of our surroundings and other nonhuman agents. Complex systems, Cooper says, shift our focus from cause-effect to “the dance of perturbation and response as agents interact” (421). For example, calling one of the LeRoy girls an agent recognizes her as an independent entity functioning in a larger system. It doesn’t mean that she necessarily is conscious of her agency or that she has the ability to will her symptoms to stop or control the way she is represented. Her agency emerges based on her interactions with other agents (girls, media, doctors,
medication). Traditionally we might have privileged the girl herself (as a coherent body, a subject, a participant in society) as an independent agent, but an agency that emerges and is enacted acknowledges that the girl is made up of agents, some that are contained and some that spill out of her, that interact with other agents. Agency is the actions that are possible, in breathing or not, in ticking or not, in accepting a diagnosis or not.

I turn to these two critiques of studying rhetoric ontologically not only to dispute popular misconceptions of this vein of scholarship but also to highlight the ways in which affect and emotion have not yet fully entered the conversation. Affect and emotion tie new materialist theories more closely to rhetorical theory but also incite rhetorical theory to do some revising of its own. Only a few rhetorical scholars thus far (e.g., Hawk, Rickert, Edbauer) have begun to make connections between these “new” ways of seeing the world, in terms of complex systems, networks, ecologies, and affect/emotion. One way to bridge considerations of affect and matter is through assemblage theory which I’ll will pursue later in this chapter, but first I return to the question posed at the beginning of this section: what is the object “mass hysteria”?

Fire Objects

If this question seems impossible to answer, it’s likely because we think of objects as lifeless, static, and discrete, the opposite of something as complicated as the outbreak in LeRoy. For this reason, some scholars prefer terminology other than “object,” choosing “thing,” a la Heiddegger, or phenomena, like Barad.
Though I’m not particularly invested in the terminology debate, I’m taking time to consider the outbreak in LeRoy as an object because of some provocative scholarship in science, technology, and society studies. Two theories—the fluid object and fire object—help us pin down the objects of mass hysteria.

The theory of fluid objects, put forth by Marianne de Laet and Annemarie Mol in “The Zimbabwe Bush Pump: Mechanics of a Fluid Technology,” emphasizes objects’ flexible, adaptable nature. The pump, which De Laet and Mol describe as a brilliant and valuable technology, is so successful because of its fluidity; its relatively simple and intuitive design allows people to easily replace missing or broken parts with a variety of materials, including sticks. Because its boundaries are neither solid nor sharp, the pump is a fluid object which continues to work with a changing makeup. As the boundaries change, different identities emerge for the pump. We can see how mass hysteria might benefit from being studied as a fluid object, as its makeup is continually adapting. However, John Law and Vicky Singleton’s concept “fire object,” captures even more of the complexities and conflicting identities of an object like mass hysteria.

In their article “Object Lessons,” Law and Singleton explain the difficulties they faced studying the management of alcoholic liver disease in a particular healthcare system. These difficulties arose not because of the many perspectives (doctors, patients, social workers, etc.) from which the phenomenon could be studied but because the object itself was in constant flux; alcoholic liver disease is an example of what they call a “messy object.” A typical approach to studying the

---

48 I use mostly the terminology “body” and “assemblage” because they most easily traverse and encompass the varying traditions in this scholarship.
disease and its context would be epistemological, wherein researchers would consider how an object means different things to different people, how it comes to be known. However, Law and Singleton decide to study the disease ontologically, actually thinking about “the nature of objects in the world—about what counts as an object” (334). To do this, they suggest, we need to acknowledge that “realities, messy or otherwise, are enacted into being” and “in part at least, such enactments take place in the practices of getting to know those realities” (334). So while something like alcoholic liver disease may seem to cease to be an object at all, it only seems that way because our methods for studying it don’t allow us to recognize it as such.

Law and Singleton suggest that alcoholic liver disease could be studied as de Laet and Mol’s fluid object or as a networked object (as constituted by its relations which allows it to hold its shape for a period of time), but they also offer a new theory of a fire object to better capture the disease.49 They assert the “fire object” is a way to better account for the presences and absences of an object: “The present object implies realities that are necessarily absent, that cannot be brought to presence; that are othered. So, to put it slightly differently, an object is a pattern of presences and absences” (342-3). There are aspects of the object that are absent but still generative. For example, when studying the disease on the level of a body, the other realities of the disease (its object on the hospital or societal level) are necessarily absent. They write, “The argument in part is that

49 It’s worth noting that the fire object doesn’t exclude an object from being fluid or networked. Law and Singleton are not proposing “fire object” as the best theory of objects, but as one possible way to rethink the multiplicity of objects.
fires are energetic and transformative, and depend on difference—for instance between (absent) fuel or cinders and (present) flame. Fire objects, then, depend upon otherness, and that otherness is generative” (344). The object of the disease on the level of a body (its cause and its prognosis) inform the object of the disease on the level of society (its social beginnings and treatments) and vice versa. They go on: “We are arguing, then, that alcoholic liver disease and its treatment in the hospital are fire-like objects. They are generated in juxtaposition with realities that are necessarily absent, even though they bring versions of those realities to presence” (345). As I will show more extensively in the following chapter, mass hysteria, too, can be studied as a fire object.

Like alcoholic liver disease, mass hysteria becomes multiple objects with generative presences and absences. If we were to take an epistemological approach, as Law and Singleton explain, to studying mass hysteria, we might focus on how we come to know illness (as doctors, through media outlets, first-hand accounts, etc.). But an ontological approach would consider how the hysteria changes itself based on the presence, absence, and otherness of its identities. For example, in a psychologist’s office, mass hysteria is evidence of trauma, a disorder of the mind, something to be overcome (perhaps with a change in life circumstance and therapy); on various TV programs, it becomes a mystery illness, an environmental contagion, a plight of girlhood, or a curse; and among the girls themselves, it is something that binds them, a manifestation of their bond (of their struggles, material circumstance, etc). Mass hysteria’s objectness emerges through these series of presences and absences. Even when two afflicted girls are alone, when the object of mass hysteria is an identification
or a mark of a confluence of painful life circumstances (despite differences in their pasts, lifestyles, and bodies), the historical and cultural object of mass hysteria is necessarily absent but never gone. Even if the object of mass hysteria is in one moment an identification, an acknowledgement of suffering, its objectness as dysfunction, abnormality, or girlhood irrationality is absent but still generative.

I draw attention to the fire object because it is one specific example of how ontological approaches to defining objects could change how we approach rhetorical projects. The theory of fire objects acknowledges the impossibility of defining a discrete object of study but it also points our attention to how we can identify multiple predominant objects in what we study. Of course we can never grasp all of the objects of mass hysteria or any other phenomenon, but identifying the predominant objects and how they come into presence and go into absence (and how each of those objects is part of a different rhetorical situation) gives us a fuller picture of what we study. It might seem that an object like mass hysteria exceeds the purview of rhetoric, that there are too many variables (biological, psychological, environmental, etc.) whose purposes or agency we can’t account for, echoing in many ways the concerns of the Big Rhetoric and agency debates. However, the theory of fire objects isolates different manifestations of phenomena so that we can consider various rhetorical purposes and affects in a given situation, isolating, for example, mass hysteria as a psychological syndrome, a mystery illness, or an identification.

Popular understandings of affect often suggest that we can’t bring affect fully into presence, that if affect is a preconscious bodily intensity (a la Massumi),
bringing it into presence—recognizing it, naming it—pulls affect into the realm of emotion. But just as presence is fueled by absence, so too is emotion fueled by affect, the visible fueled by the invisible, and the phantom fueled by the limb. The fire object calls attention to the generative relationship between presence and absence and the rhetorical aims and affects of those presences and absences. Before we can study affect rhetorically, before we can study the affects of mass hysteria, we have to do a better job of pinning down its multiple objects. Each object has its own affects, and in this way, affect is central in defining and assembling objects—“messy” or otherwise.

Assembling Affect

Early theories of affect often emphasized its power as a verb; affect wasn’t invoked so much as a companion to emotion, sensation, or feeling as much as it was considered an action, movement, and force. A lot of recent scholarship uses “affect” to qualify other things,\(^{50}\) for example “affective lives,” “the affective component of writing and reading,” “affective potential,” “affective dimension,” or “affective capacity.”\(^{51}\) In these examples, affect qualifies other phenomena or denotes a realm we can’t readily access or understand. Though there’s nothing inherently wrong with this, as a stand-in for anything extralinguistic, affect’s rhetorical work is less clear; “affective” often refers to a more abstract, new, or sophisticated level of whatever is being studied. The question that many scholars

\(^{50}\) Two excellent exceptions are Daniel Smith (2003) and Jenny Edbauer Rice (2004).

\(^{51}\) These phrases can be found among Worsham (1999), Pruchnic and Lacey (2011), Strickland (2007), Crane (2003), Rachel Riedner (2007)
have pursued in the field is *what can we do with affect?* But a question like this mischaracterizes affect itself. Instead, we ought to be asking *what does affect do to us?* One answer to this question is it assembles. Whereas assemblage theory was central for theorizing affect for Deleuze (whose theory is rooted in Spinoza), it was less so for Massumi. Scholars who turn only to Massumi for a theory of affect might miss the rhetorical potential that exists in considering the assembling power of affect.

Although Deleuze and Guattarri spend little over 20 pages discussing assemblages in their otherwise exhaustive work, *A Thousand Plateaus*, proponents of the theory claim Deleuze develops his assemblage theory through his entire oeuvre. Scholars across disciplines use the assemblage generally to describe dynamic, heterogeneous collectives of humans and nonhumans. As opposed to some conceptions of the network, the assemblage never has a fixed identity but is always collecting, becoming, composing, and decomposing. One of the most prominent assemblage theory scholars is social scientist Manuel De Landa who puts forth an assemblage-based ontology in *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*. Uprooting persisting understandings of individuals and societies in social theory, assemblage theory, De Landa argues, offers a new paradigm. An assemblage, while it is a whole, is not a totality; it’s not seamless and has no essence. Rather the assemblage has synthetic and emergent properties, resulting from the interaction of its parts. A part can be a member of multiple assemblages; De Landa calls this “Relations of exteriority” which “guarantee that assemblages may be taken apart while at the same time allowing that the interactions between parts may result in a true
synthesis” (11). He discourages thinking of any assemblage in terms of interiority because it perpetuates the idea of essence. Of the many concepts that are caught up in assemblages for Deleuze and Guatarri, I will focus on just two here that I think are especially relevant to affect and rhetoric: double articulation and territorialization. The following is a brief, and therefore necessarily reductive, explanation of both.

To understand the assemblage rhetorically, we must first figure out how it comes into being. Double articulation is a dual process of creation that “is so extremely variable,” Deleuze and Guattari claim, they “cannot begin with a general model, only a relatively simple case” (40). They go on to explain:

The first articulation chooses or deducts, from unstable particleflows, metastable molecular or quasi-molecular units (substances) upon which it imposes statistical order of connections and successions (forms). The second articulation establishes functional, compact, stable structures (forms), and constructs the molar compounds in which these structures are simultaneously actualized (substances). (41)

Their initial example is a geological stratum, in which the first articulation is sedimentation; the sediment is deposited in a statistical order. Then, in the second articulation, the sediment stabilizes into rock. While the first articulation selects, sorts, and orders substances (formed matter), the second articulation produces a more stabilized form; the assemblage is actualized, and this is where integration, unification, and hierarchization happens and where qualities and capacities emerge. The first is concerned with “content” and the second
“expression,” though neither content nor expression is preexisting; they emerge together (inseparably) in each becoming. De Landa delineates the two articulations by suggesting the first is nondiscursive and the second discursive or is a process of coding. Because assembling is a recurring process that is never complete, there is always slippage in the process of sorting and stabilizing, and assemblages can always fall apart. Territorialization (and relatedly, deterritorialization and reterritorialization) is part of the process of the first articulation in which matter (human and nonhuman) is sorted. De Landa explains that territorialization defines and sharpens (spatial or nonspatial) boundaries or territories; he gives the example of people being sorted and included/excluded in groups and organizations.

In another example, Deleuze and Guattari put forth some “general conclusions on the nature of assemblages” and they map double articulation onto axes:

On a first, horizontal, axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a machinic assemblage of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand it is a collective assemblage of enunciation, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then on the vertical axis, the assemblage has both territorial sides, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and cutting edges of deterritorialization, which carry it away. (88)
On the horizontal axis, the assemblage is formed through the arrangement and collecting of bodies, actions, and passions; on the vertical axis, the assemblage is further recognized as an independent entity which has particular boundaries. In social organizations and assemblages, shared identities, values, and motivations bind people for a period of time.

While undoubtedly a complicated process that can never be fully pulled apart for examination, the formation of assemblages is useful for studying events that have many parts or variables; we can begin to understand rhetorical situations as assemblages, whose parts are pulled in and articulated differently depending on the situation, or how parts fulfill varying rhetorical functions in assemblages or are called to function rhetorically differently. For example, the tic of a hysterical girl in an assemblage of other girls identifies her with them; in the assemblage of a body, the tic is an exigence to address an underlying problem; or in the assemblage of the Dr. Drew show, the tic is a representation of mystery, dysfunction, or performance. In a hysterical body, through the process of double articulation, bodily matter, material circumstance, psychological state, and exposure (along with innumerable other parts) gather to manifest in a tic; intensities from inside and outside the individual collide to create the becoming of hysteria. Then, of course, as more girls exhibit symptoms, they too are being assembled and sorted by healthcare professionals, peers, and the news media, to become the group of hysterical girls. We can see how the assemblages grow and change and die, encompassing many parts.

The relationship between cause and effect in assemblage theory is an emergent, productive relationship. Rather than thinking of one entity or body
being the cause of a given effect, De Landa asserts, in assemblage theory the cause is a change, action, or movement. The possible affects of a body become the causes (the changes) that form new relations. To think of affect in terms of the assemblage is to think of it as becoming. As Deleuze and Guattari explain:

To every relation of movement and rest, speed and slowness grouping together an infinity of parts, there corresponds a degree of power. To the relations composing, decomposing, or modifying an individual there correspond intensities that affect it, augmenting or diminishing its power to act; these intensities come from external parts or from the individual’s own parts. Affects are becomings.

(256)

This explanation highlights the relational and ecological aspects of affect, specifically how in relations and movement, parts of an assemblage come together and diverge, altering each part’s power to act. Relations are constantly composing and decomposing, allowing or restricting an individual’s capacity to influence. For rhetoric, then, affect is part of what is becoming the available means (of persuasion) in a given situation. It is what propels parts into grouping but also what gives and removes power. Affects are not random forces that pervade everything, but are instrumental in the becoming of humans, objects, rhetoric—assemblages of all kinds. Merleau-Ponty offers a prime example of the assembling power of a nonhuman affect in his writing about honey. He explains, “Honey is a particular way the world has of acting on me and my body” (World 47). Honey, an assemblage of pollen, nectar, bees, bee-keepers, shop owners, and taste buds, is not inert; rather “we are moved or compelled to treat it in certain
way . . . it has a particular way of seducing, attracting or fascinating the free subject who stands before us” (47). More than just explaining how matter comes together, assemblage theory is important to understanding what affect does.

Defining Bodies by their Affects

One of the primary reasons scholars across disciplines have turned to affect theory is because it demands that we begin accounting for the role of bodies, not just how existing within a body shapes the way we perceive the world but also how processes like learning, rationalizing, and persuading are embodied. A heightened focus on bodies for rhetoric means considering how our bodies persuade and are persuaded, yet to entertain these considerations, we must determine what makes up a body, where a body begins and ends. Might our bodies extend to the media we use and consume, as Marshall McLuhan has suggested or might bodies be made up of machinic, nonhuman parts as Donna Harraway’s cyborg suggests? Rhetoric might seem to be an odd discipline for debates about bodies and materiality, as Celeste Condit asks in “The Materiality of Coding,”

Surely, speaking and writing are not material in the same sense genetic coding is? Except in war and lovemaking, human beings do not use the physical conformations of their bodies and direct contact with other physical substances to communicate in the direct fashion used by amino acids and other molecules. Yet further reflection suggests that communication is every bit as material.
Speaking is an act of breathing, of the physical vibration of air molecules, of hearts supplying blood for hand motions and body-lean. (327)

But as Condit and scholars like Hawhee have asserted, just acknowledging that these physical and material elements exist doesn’t do enough to advance our rhetorical theories. The more difficult task is figuring out what it means to account for bodies in rhetorical theory—a consideration that might be best theorized in relation to affect.

Following Deleuze and Guattari, bodies compose and decompose based on how they affect and are affected by other bodies. Affects are central to the formulation, arrangement, exigence, and dissolution of bodies—human, textual, rhetorical, mediated, etc. Bodies, in this configuration, are human and nonhuman and are made up of an infinite number of parts. Edbauer (2004) explains this as a sort of expanding: “It is the experience that we are not alone(ly), but that we exist in relations beyond what we may recognize or even wish.” These relations with other human and nonhuman bodies constitute the coming together and falling apart of any event: “Affect marks the lived duration between two states experienced by one body that is affected by another body” (Edbauer). This view of affect is very much grounded in Spinoza, wherein a body’s individuality is defined by, as Deleuze explains in Spinoza: Practical Philosophy, “relations of motion and rest, speeds and slowness” and its “the capacity for affecting and being affected” (123).

Subverting the definition of bodies by a physical or visible border or limit, Spinoza defines bodies by their affective potential. Because bodies, for Spinoza,
are made up of an infinite number of particles, “whole” would never be an accurate description of a body because wholeness implies stability. Deleuze gives the example of how a plow horse is more similar to an ox than a racehorse because their affects are similar. This introduces a new way of categorizing bodies, in which affects are the central mode of definition; we are defined by what we can do, say, and incite. For Spinoza, affect is a capacity; as any event or assemblage changes, so does our power to affect, to persuade. As Spinoza writes in his Ethics, “By affect I understand the affections of the body, by which the power of acting of the body itself is increased, diminished, helped, or hindered, together with the ideas of these affections” (106). We transition from one state to another toward more or less perfection, an increase or decrease in the power to act. As bodies move from one state to another, their rhetorical abilities to act are created and diminished.

To accept these propositions means that we resist defining bodies by their forms; rather, bodies are in a constant state of composing and decomposing: “The important thing is to understand life, each living individuality, not as a form, or a development of form, but as a complex relation between differential velocities, between deceleration and acceleration of particles. A composition of speeds and slownesses on a plane of immanence” (Spinoza 123). Even if we were to acknowledge a human body as discrete, its makeup constantly changes—through the consumption of nutrients, illnesses that subsume it or are overcome, levels of exertion, absorption of chemicals and topical treatments, changes in climate, etc. A body’s border similarly changes to include things like hearing aids, tumors, body hair, etc. And because, as Deleuze writes, “all bodies are in extension,” parts
of a human body extend out to other bodies and may leave ours for another (114). The tic of a hysteric girl extends into the space around her but also extends to other girls who consume and develop the tic; similarly, the tic extends into the news media that seek to capture it. The tic is an affect that both defines the hysteric girl but also extends beyond her to have other rhetorical affects, as it becomes for example, the focal point of the news media interviews.

Studying the possible affects of bodies in a situation is a chiefly rhetorical task. This approach is important for thinking about intersecting rhetorical situations, in which bodies can have multiple roles (as exigences and constraints for example) depending on their affects. Similarly, affects are central in emerging, categorizing, and identifying bodies. When a LeRoy girl develops a tic—when tics are one of her affects—she becomes a hysteric. But when she appears on the Dr. Drew show and her tics cease, people question whether she really is a hysteric. No identity is static. Through individual (and cultural) narratives and memories, some affects (especially those that don’t make sense given our experience) spur strong emotional reactions. The fear, for example, surrounding hysteria is in part a fear of its affects. This fear grows only because we can never fully know our affective capacities:

That is why Spinoza calls out to us in the way he does: you do not know beforehand what good or bad you are capable of; you do

---

52 In fact, when one of the interviews failed to capture the tic—when one of the girls being interviewed failed to exhibit symptoms—the viewing audience used it as evidence that the girls were faking the syndrome.
not know beforehand what a body or a mind can do, in a given
counter, a given arrangement, a given combination. (Spinoza
125)

While this may seem to suggest that we have no control over our bodies and
affects, we have to remember that patterns emerge; all bodies are in relation. We
might not be able to predict with much accuracy what affects we and others will
have in the future, but we can better understand the available affects of bodies in
a rhetorical situation in the moment.

Affective Agency

An understanding of affect through Spinoza, Deleuze, and Guattari
suggests that affects are the very basis for what is rhetorically possible. Within
this framework, rhetorical concepts and theories have no essence—only affects. A
rhetor, audience, or text is defined by its affects and its capacities in any given
situation, so a rhetor is a rhetor only because she has an audience, the ability to
persuade, to recognize and respond to an exigence, etc. This means, of course,
that a rhetor doesn’t have to be human. As long as a body has the affects of a
rhetor, given its relation to other bodies, it is a rhetor. Thus, this framework could
be used to describe almost anything as rhetorical but also to consider central
rhetorical theories and concepts in different light, to ask for example, What are
the affects we assume a rhetor, text, or audience has? What possibilities do we
allow and deny through our assigning of affects?
If we understand affects to be what is possible for any body in any situation, we can harness these possibilities, rhetorically, in different ways. While we have little control over some affects, others affects we can change and control. Think for example about our relation to the earth. One affect we can hardly avoid is stepping, trampling, or driving on the earth, yet there are other affects we have on the earth we can control, e.g. mowing, composting, or reducing our carbon imprint. We know that the affects we have on the earth change our relation to it, change the body of the earth and our bodies. One could even consider global warming as the world’s affect on us—an emergence of many chemical, ecological, human bodies. Affects are closely tied to theories of agency, as a body’s affects (both the affects that are available and not to a body) enable its agency. This sort of emergent, agential affect aligns closely with physicist Karen Barad’s theory of agential realism, which she writes about in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. She argues representationalism is problematic because it “separates the world into ontologically disjoint domains of words and things, leaving the dilemma of their linkage” (137). However, similar to assemblage theory, she introduces a theory of “intra-action” which describes the process by which phenomena\(^{53}\) emerge; agency in this configuration is also emergent:

> Agency is not held, it is not a property of persons or things; rather, agency is an enactment, a matter of possibilities for reconfiguring

---

\(^{53}\) Barad uses “phenomena” as the primary ontological unit rather than “thing” or “object” because those concepts suggest separation and individuality; phenomena on the other hand are “dynamic topological reconfigurings/entaglements/relationalties/(re)articulations of the world” (142).
entanglements. So agency is not about choice in any liberal humanist sense; rather, it is about the possibilities and accountability entailed in reconfiguring material-discursive apparatuses of bodily production, including the boundary articulations and exclusions that are marked by those practices.

(“Interview” 58)

Thus, similar to Cooper, Barad asserts agency is enacted. Rhetorically, it’s a matter of figuring out how our and others’ affects can “reconfigure entanglements.” Defining affect in this way resists an understanding of affects as free-floating or representational; they assemble and dissemble us and rhetoric into bodies. In this way, affect and matter are closely entwined; as Bennett has suggested, “I equate affect with materiality, rather than posit a separate force that can enter and animate a physical body.” (xiii). This helps us understand how phenomenon like the phantom limb, regardless of its material presence (as an appendage or in the brain), is affectively present and persuasive, through the affect of pain. This kind of rhetorical affect is what I hope to highlight in the application of my theoretical framework in the following chapter, to reveal some of the multifaceted ways that affects and emotions work in a complex rhetorical events.

Perhaps these theories of affect sounds like the “impractical theory-talk”\(^5\) that so many scholars bemoan. Yet they capture both affect’s complexity (that we can never really grasp all of the affects that surround us) but also its work in a

\(^5\) As referenced in Edbauer Rices’s examples from the WPA Listserv thread in “(Meta)Physical Graffiti: ‘Getting Up” as Affective Writing Model.”
rhetorical situation, as its various parts (bodies) come into being only in their relations with one another, in their capacities to affect and be affected. If we take this version of affect to consider the work of pathos in a rhetorical situation, we can see how it becomes more than just a tool to be invoked, a twist in style, a flair in delivery. Rather than being primarily the impetus for a situation or the desired result of rhetoric, affects and emotions become the very circumstance in which all things (rhetorical and not) come together, the very basis of change. This view is actually not so far off from Aristotle’s two millennia ago: *pathe*, the emotions “are all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgments, and that are also attended by pain or pleasure.” The emotions neither begin nor end in a human body; they emerge among the relations of rhetor, audience, exigence, and constraint, and each of these entities is limited by the possible feelings, the affects, it can elicit. This theory of affect, while not transparent, allows us to imagine what it might entail to see pathos as the very foundation for rhetoric.
CHAPTER FOUR

A Rhetorical Analysis of Mass Hysteria

The debate surrounding the outbreak of mass hysteria in LeRoy could have ended January 11, 2012. On that day, Dr. Gregory Young presented the results of the New York State Department of Health’s investigation to over 150 concerned community members in the LeRoy High School auditorium. Dr. Young reported that no infectious or environmental causes could be found, but citing HIPPA regulations, claimed he wouldn’t release the real diagnosis—conversion disorder turned mass psychogenic illness. When Dr. Young repeatedly refused to reveal the diagnosis for the girls (what he said would be a breach of privacy), an unafflicted student named Jessica confronted Dr. Young in the front of the group: “You think it’s unethical for you not to give us the cause. I think it’s wrong for you not to tell us . . . You’re not telling us the truth because you don’t really know what’s going on” (Owens). The Department of Health, school administration, and doctors treating the girls all hoped this meeting would mitigate the community’s concerns, but the overwhelming sentiment toward the report might be best summed up by Jim Dupont, one of the parents who was interviewed by local
news media after the meeting: “Well in my opinion we've only just begun. If you haven't found anything then we have to turn some more stones and we need to have another investigation that is not government related” (Brean).

If parents, girls, and local residents had accepted the diagnosis (despite Dr. Young’s refusal to publicly name it, most in the community knew several of the girls had begun successful treatment for conversion disorder), this case could have slowly come to an end—the girls could have continued treatment at Dent Neurological Institute, and their symptoms could have ceased. But when parents decided to create a support group and turn to the national news media, this became a whole other event; news reporters swarmed the town, conspiracy theorists plead their cases, fear in the community escalated, symptoms worsened, and the number of afflicted more than doubled to twenty-four.

Similarly, a rhetorical study of this case might have ended with the report from the New York State Department of Health. A traditional rhetorical study of this case might begin with choosing the central texts in this event. I might have begun by close reading the report and a few other articles and interviews, looking for rhetorical appeals and strategies. I would have considered the persuasive effects of these texts, the strength of their evidence, and to whom they were written. If that report, whose dual purpose was presenting scientific findings to a lay-audience and mitigating fear in the community, had been the end of this story, it could have been the end of my analysis. But instead, the report was the
impetus for parents—who have been described by anthropologist Ryan Cook as “concerned but poorly informed” (3)—to ask the national news media for help. This decision produced a case of mass hysteria that has never been seen before—wherein news and social media became the main site for transmission of the symptoms.

Between January and February 2012, hundreds of international articles and news segments covered the “mystery illness” in LeRoy. The most sustained coverage (and arguably most sensational) came from Dr. Drew Pinksy, who Cook describes, “enthusiastically positioned himself as [the girls’] advocate” (3). On his talk show, he had an almost daily report on the girls for several weeks. It seemed that for every news report that asserted the girls were suffering from mass psychogenic illness, there were twice as many that introduced conspiracy theories about the cause of the symptoms. As Cook describes: “For their part, news organizations continued to emphasize the mysteriousness of the illness even after it was officially labeled MPI, and they circulated dramatic videos on TV and the internet of the afflicted exhibiting tics.” (4). Meanwhile, the public, through blogs and internet comments, weighed in on the cause of the symptoms, offering any number of modern-day ills—environmental pollution, vaccines, social media, atheism, premarital sex, etc. By the middle of March, the news media went

---

55 One of only a few scholars who have published about the case, Cook does an ethnographic study called “I Didn’t Want to Be One of the Contaminated People”: Confronting a Mystery Illness in a Rural American Landscape.”
silent. Only a few local news stories have covered the girls since—all suggesting there’s not much to report. The girls have been treated and are better.

The study of this case, as I’ve suggested, requires a new kind of approach and methodology. My analysis is informed by the study of approximately fifty newspaper articles and blog posts on the case (including thousands of comments), twelve television news reports on the girls (including several interviews), and the report issued by the New York State Department of Health. But I won’t be turning to those articles, interviews, and stories as central texts of my analysis. In keeping with my desire to pursue a study of more than the discourse surrounding the event, I’ll turn to these texts in support of finding the emotions and affects that propelled this case, to identify new kinds of persuasion and rhetorical relations. I won’t be studying this event as a traditional rhetorical object per se; rather my approach begins in the middle to discern what objects, bodies, assemblages, and affects are holding the event together. While unorthodox, this isn’t such a new approach; scholars in critical and cultural rhetoric have been arguing for similar methodologies for decades. In his seminal argument for critical rhetoric Raymie McKerrow (1989), for example, argues against “universalist” approaches to rhetorical criticism that “privilege reason above all else” (124); he, instead, asserts,

To approach mediated communication as rhetorical is to see it in its fragmented, unconnected, even contradictory or momentarily oppositional mode of presentation . . . The process one employs is

56 This was most likely because the girls’ physicians were finally able to convince them that interacting with the news media was making their symptoms worse.
thus geared to uncovering the ‘dense web’ (Moscow), not by means of a simple speaker-audience interaction but also by the means of a ‘pulling together’ of disparate scraps of discourse which, when constructed as an argument, serve to illuminate otherwise hidden or taken for granted social practices. (134)

The analysis that follows aims to study more than the many speaker-audience interactions in this event; instead, it hopes to “pull together disparate scraps of discourse”—cultural, mediated, bodily, emotional discourses—to reveal some of the emotional and affective arguments and influences in this case. Though not all events need be studied on the level of affect and emotion, I’m interested in considering what this would look like. What could we uncover, if we began our studies not by imposing theories of persuasion, the rhetorical situation, or rhetorical appeals onto our objects of study, but by looking for the objects, bodies, assemblages, and affects at the core of our studies?

Thus, this chapter applies the framework put forth in the previous chapter alongside analysis of reports of the case and situated among some of vast scholarship on hysteria, which has influenced popular and medical understandings of the syndrome.\(^57\) By situating analysis of the case within some of this literature, I hope to point out the recursivity of historical and cultural connotations of hysteria as they inspired some of the mediation and reception of

\(^{57}\) We mustn’t forget, for example, in the 19\(^{th}\) century, hysteria was touted as the most common illness treated by physicians in Western Europe and the U.S. Hysteria was called both the “The English Malady” by physician George Cheyene and “American Nervousness” by physician George Beard. At that time, hysteria was still believed to be a somatic disorder, often attributed to the nerves.
this case. As a syndrome, hysteria has a long history of being described in emotional terms. Understanding how hysteria has been suffered, diagnosed, and treated historically is important for making sense of the cultural mythology surrounding this baffling syndrome.

Defining Rhetorical Objects

Just as a traditional case study would begin by defining its object of study, I, too, will begin considering mass hysteria as an object. After consideration of how it’s been historically conceived as an object, I’ll use Law and Singleton’s theory of fire objects to reveal how mass hysteria becomes different objects in different venues and with different relations. Historically, hysteria has often been described as an excess of emotion, a disease that inflicts those who cannot appropriately handle or control their feelings and desires (Shorter 1993, Scull 2009). Seventeenth century physician Thomas Sydenham, for example, blamed hysteria on “the passions”; he said of his hysterical patients, “All is caprice. They love without measure those whom they will soon hate without reason” (quoted in Scull 33). He understood hysterics to be impulsive, weak, and easily affected. Today, despite a better medical understanding of hysteria, we still think of

58 Since the APA dropped “hysteria” as a diagnosis in 1952, it has introduced a number of new disorders that explain what were previously considered hysterical symptoms (psychogenic and psychosomatic illnesses, like conversion disorder and somatization disorder). While some physicians believe hysteria has simply waned in the 20th century (like small pox, polio, or gout), others argue that hysteria is as widespread as ever; it has just slipped into disguise. Recently, scholars suggest that PTSD, chronic fatigue syndrome, and borderline personality disorder may be new manifestations of the syndrome.
emotionally (and often sexually) maladapted people, as psychoanalyst Chirstopher Bollas points out:

When we think of hysteria we think of people who are troubled by their body’s sexual demands and repress sexual ideas; who are indifferent to conversion; who are overidentified with the other; who express themselves in a theatrical manner; who daydream existence rather than engage it; and who prefer the illusion of childlike innocence to the worldliness of adulthood. (1)

Bollas captures a common way of thinking about hysterics, as both excitable and weak, which prevails in descriptions of the LeRoy girls. Susan Dominus’ exposé in *The New York Times Magazine* describes the scene in LeRoy: “Parents wept as their daughters stuttered at the dinner table. Teachers shut their classroom doors when they heard a din of outbursts, one cry triggering another, sending the increasingly familiar sounds ricocheting through the halls.” There is a hopelessness that pervades these kinds of descriptions, but also a hint of annoyance—doors have to be closed in order for everyday life to continue. This annoyance can quickly become resentment, as we can see in a comment from Lorie Longhany, the chairwoman of the Genesee County Democratic Committee: “Without laying any blame on any of these families — they’re going through their private hell with this. But it’s not private hell, it’s public hell. It’s almost like a depression has just settled over Le Roy” (quoted in Dominus). The fact that this case of mass hysteria was so public contributes to the emotional climate of the whole town. Underlying this annoyance or resentment seems to be a critique of the girls themselves; because the illness is psychological (the outbursts
illustrating, to some, a lack of restraint), the girls’ inability to stop the symptoms seems to indicate a lack of psychological fortitude.

As many looked on at the seemingly out-of-control girls, one central emotion emerged—pity. And it is the spurning of onlookers’ pity that seems to keep girls and their families from accepting the illness, that fuels comments from parents like Heather Parker who said, “That mass psychogenic illness—that’s just a bunch of hoggy” (quoted in Dominus). An environmental or infectious cause for the symptoms is much easier to digest because it places the cause of the illness in the environment, not originating within the girls’ themselves, in bodies that can’t control themselves. This is an understanding of hysteria (a historical object of hysteria) that has existed for centuries; Ruth Graham of Slate notes how closely the outbreak mirrors historical connotations of hysteria: “As archetypes go, the Salem events hold up quite well, even from a distance of 320 years. Victims of mass hysteria are so often female that gender imbalance is one clue doctors use to differentiate hysteria from poisoning.” But holding onto these archetypes, accepting this object of mass hysteria, comes at a cost; it fails to capture the complexity of the realities of mass hysteria that are brought to the fore in this event. Different versions of this object emerge depending on whether mass hysteria is portrayed on the national stage as a site of mystery, in the doctor’s office, or between two girls. A theory of fire objects, however, shows how mass hysteria as an object changes over time but also how it can be multiple objects simultaneously.

Recognizing a thing or a phenomenon as a fire object means paying attention to the invisible work and realities of an object. When one of the versions
or objects of mass hysteria comes into presence, the others become necessarily absent; they are “discontinuous realities that cannot be held together or brought to presence” (Law and Singleton 344). These sets of absences are “othered,” suggest Law and Singleton, and it is the otherness and difference that is so generative in creating and sustaining a complex syndrome like mass hysteria. Like Law and Singleton assert about alcoholic liver disease, this case encompasses versions of mass hysteria that are made up of presences and absences—each of which have varied emotional and affective influences. Mass hysteria is an object that spreads across mind, body, and society. Looking at the different objects of mass hysteria at work in this event explains why there is so much disagreement among parties who grappled with the definition, cause, treatment, and significance of this syndrome. Though there are many objects of mass hysteria that are prominent in this event, I’ll look specifically at objects the news media produces and also the objects that come into being when the girls interact with each other.

On the level of the news media, many of the reports and interviews made the object of mass hysteria a mystery, as we can see in headlines like “Corinth Girl’s Tics Are a Medical Mystery”; “Mysterious Illness At Leroy High School”; “Le Roy Student Speaks out about Illness, Lack of Answers”; “Facial Tics, Verbal Outbursts Perplex Community”; “The Mystery of 18 Twitching Teenagers in Le Roy New York”; “Mystery Malady; No known Cause.”59 When we accept this version of mass hysteria as a mystery illness what is absent is a diagnosis, which

59 These headlines come, in order, from the following news organizations: WNYT 13, WKBW, WGRZ, USA Today, The New York Times Magazine, Nightline ABC.
inspires fear, intrigue, or suspicion, depending on who you are. (For the individual this might fuel the denial of an underlying issue.) This version of the illness is dependent upon the presence of symptoms, which opens opportunities to diagnose and/or analyze their meaning. With the emergence of conspiracy theories, the news media has an opportunity to (in denying the real diagnosis and making it absent) continue reporting on a story that remains intriguing only because a diagnosis is absent. But the “mystery illness” can only be sustained for so long; once the diagnosis is widely accepted among the news media, the absence of mystery closes off particular opportunities and understandings of the syndrome. When the mystery is absent, the story is no longer interesting to the general public. The news media, in choosing to highlight the “mystery illness,” produced an object that inspired fear, intrigue, and curiosity in the general viewing audience; this object, because of its mystery, incited a unique kind of emotional investment in the viewing audience.

Not all new organizations insisted this case was a mystery; some reporters accepted and reported the diagnosis. Though this object of mass hysteria would seem to simply be the medical diagnosis, these portrayals often suggested mass hysteria is rooted in the difficult (emotional) experience of being a teenage girl on the brink of adulthood. Dominus’ article presents this object of mass hysteria, as does the accompanying cover photo on The New York Times Magazine. Two of the girls (Thera and Katie) sit on a bed in a room that by all indications is a girl’s: the wall is painted a loud yellow; the comforter is colorfully striped and the bed is accented with bright pink pillows and blankets (one says “LOVE” on it in the fashion of the Victoria’s Secret PINK line). Above their heads hang large collages
of pictures; groups of girls are pasted together with other memorabilia, including a peace sign sticker. The setting of the photo suggests these are just girls—the kind who paste their memories and dreams above their beds. Yet what the girls wear and how they are posed suggests they are on the precipice of womanhood. Both girls appear to have dressed up for the event: their hair is styled, they’re wearing make up, Thera wears a silk shirt, and Katie wears a fashion scarf. They sit, shoulders touching, legs intertwined, closing in toward each other, in way that appears both comforting but also slightly erotic (it’s a pose we rarely see adult women or men in). However, at the same time, we are reminded of their youth by their distressed blue jeans and brightly patterned fashion socks sticking out toward the camera.

The photo captures the girls in their everyday environment—surrounded by symbols of girlhood—yet the environment is juxtaposed with the seriousness of their faces, a reminder of their current trials and the severity of their illness. This version of mass hysteria brings innocence, beauty, and potential into presence, but wild, inappropriate outbursts and movements threaten to spoil this potential. There’s a sense, in this version of mass hysteria, that so much could be lost. Viewers seemed to be transfixed with the idea that as parent Jim DuPont put it, “These kids are totally normal, and the next thing you know their arms are swinging and they can't control themselves.” We’re reminded of the fragility of health, of how quickly youth and beauty can be spoiled. This take on hysteria can be seen in as early as Freud’s famous study of Dora.\textsuperscript{60} Dora was, Freud explains,

\textsuperscript{60} In his 1905 \textit{An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria} (often just referred to as \textit{Dora}), Freud set out to analyze a typical case of hysteria. He writes a detailed account of
“in the first bloom of youth—a girl of intelligent and engaging looks” (38) yet “unmistakably neurotic” (34). Freud’s first bloom metaphor suggests more than Dora’s youth, promise, and innocence; every bloom closes and wilts. In this same way, hysteria risks spoiling the first bloom of womanhood. This alternate version of mass hysteria, while it may seem to more accurately portray the illness, is used by the news media to incite a different kind of emotion—not the fear of contagion of a mystery illness but a sadness for the girls, a sadness for what they lost and might still lose.

While the way mass hysteria was portrayed in the news media (and to what ends) is important for understanding this event, we can’t ignore the object of mass hysteria on the level of the girls, whose identities change throughout the case. As the event progresses and as more parties (doctors, TV personalities, community members, conspiracy theorists, etc.) join the public discourse surrounding the illness, various identities of the girl emerges; the girl herself, doctors, and the news media all play a role in calling particular identities into presence and pushing others into absence. Before the girl develops symptoms, her identity is as a healthy girl and the absent realities of her identity are minimal. While she understands that she (like anyone) could become ill, she has likely never experienced the debilitating involuntary symptoms that she soon will. When the girl develops symptoms, a number of identities emerge: the hysterics, the girl suffering from mystery symptoms, the faker of symptoms, etc. Depending on what situation she’s in—in a doctor’s office, on the Dr. Drew Show, 

his perceptions and diagnosis of Dora who suffered from difficulty breathing, loss of voice, heavy coughing, and headaches, paired with social avoidance and depression.
on Facebook—different identities for the girl become prominent. These changing and multiple identities would be understandably confusing and frustrating for anyone. Even when the girl is cured, the realities of her illness—the version of her that was broadcast on national television, the way she was treated as an example of a mystery illness, the way her parents, community members, physicians, and strangers alike fought over what she was (a hysterical, a faker, a site of pity)—may be absent but are still generative. When contemplating the emotional experience of the girl, we can see how her various identities (both assigned to her and personally accepted) allow her to be represented in different ways. Fear—the predominant emotion in much of this case—was propagated by the uncertainty of the girl’s identity.

When different versions of the girls were portrayed in the media, the stakes of taking on one identity over another became high for the girls, especially as they chose which treatment to receive. Dominus explains the tension that arose when some of the girls, instead of continuing treatment at the Dent Neurological Institute for conversion disorder, decided to see Dr. Rosario Trifiletti who asserted the syndrome was PANDAS, an autoimmune disorder:

After that, more lines were drawn in Le Roy. Some girls, including a few who had been receiving treatment at Dent, started seeing Trifiletti and taking the medications he prescribed. Others remained with their original neurologists, and were bullied on Facebook by those who were now taking the antibiotics: if you got better without the pills, you had surely been faking all along. The accusations invariably exacerbated the symptoms.
These clashes reflect what was really at stake for the girls in accepting a diagnosis. The news media’s involvement didn’t end with spinning the case in a number of ways (invoking a number of emotions) to maintain a viewing audience; the ways in which the news media pitted the diagnoses against each other had real implications on how the girls—and if the girls—would seek proper treatment for their illness.

When we study complex events like this rhetorically, we make choices to draw out particular objects and realities. Of course, it’s not always as simple as making a conscious choice to privilege one object over another. The hysteric girl, for example, waiting for a diagnosis doesn’t have the control to become the healthy girl (though arguably once the diagnosis is given, she has the choice to accept it and start the becoming of the cured girl or not), but the news media has a choice to highlight particular realities—to bring into presence the focus of their story and to push into absence what will be generative. For example, if the hysteric girl is brought into presence, the generative absences of the healthy girl can be used—loss of innocence, control—to construct an emotionally moving narrative. And this work has clear emotional and affective resonance as we can see different emotions attached to each version of the illness (pity, fear, sadness).

Typically, we might look for the role of pathos in an event like this to see which emotions are being represented or incited by particular parties in the event; however, studying mass hysteria as a fire object, we can also see how the defining of an object itself, in drawing out what we consider to be a rhetorical object is a task that privileges some emotional realities of the object and ignores others. For example, if we choose to focus solely on the fear and pity that is
associated with one version of mass hysteria, we overlook how among the girls (as we can see in their social media reprimands) this illness is also embroiled with social belonging and social standing. Studying a complex object like this means not just taking the first object of mass hysteria that comes into view—the historical or popular objects that inspire fear or pity—but also looking for other objects which might drive a different array of emotions.

Complicated Situations: Rhetorical Assemblages

As I’ve suggested in previous chapters, traditional notions of the rhetorical situation don’t fully capture an event like this. Fortunately, several scholars in our field have already theorized better ways of mapping complex rhetorical situations, in terms of networks, systems, and ecologies that emerge and overlap with other situations. Complexity theory has been a primary avenue for these pursuits, which is detailed in the 2004 special issue of JAC, in which guest editors Thomas Rickert and David Blakesley claim complexity theory “promises to challenge and transform great swaths of our received knowledge concerning rhetoric, culture, social organization, and composition” (822). Within complexity theory, controlled rhetorical situations, in which rhetor, audience, and message are discrete entities, become complex adapting systems, co-evolving with, against, among any number of nodes and networks. Relying namely on Mark C. Taylor’s The Moment of Complexity and his interdisciplinary look at emerging network culture, the authors in the JAC special issue suggest the rhetorical situation is no longer a “situation” at all, as it extends innumerably outward. No
doubt, theorizing a complex, emergent, ecological rhetorical situation is not simple. It subverts what Hawk (2004) has called “the desire for simplicity” that has “haunted rhetoric and composition for most of its history” (“Toward” 831). Accepting complexity means, as Elizabeth Birmingham (2004) suggests, “we must be willing to develop a rhetoric that values untidy and misshapen arguments” (1002). Complexity theory troubles our understandings of the role of the rhetor in, and the boundaries of, the rhetorical situation.

The rhetor is no longer the orchestrator of a situation but another system that emerges with and against the situation; some scholars have described this in terms of the writing process. As Hawk (2011) suggests, “the subject of writing is the network that inscribes the subject as the subject scribes the network” (“Reassembling” 75). The writer, then, is constructed through a circular process, along with the other components in the network. The writer and the product emerge together. Noah Roderick (2010) calls this new subject an “eco-subject”: “Under this new metaphysical goalpost, then, the writing act can be described as being a function of network behavior rather than an effect of generalizable mental processes.” The writer does not simply turn inward to identify motivations and ideas for writing; rather the writing and the writer emerge from the many interlocking social, political, historical, and emotional networks in which she is a part. This same approach can be applied to the rhetor’s role in the rhetorical situation, which, as Edbauer Rice (2005) has suggested, might be better studied as an “ecology.”61 She asserts, “An ecological, or affective, rhetorical model is one

---

that reads rhetoric both as a process of distributed emergence and as an ongoing circulation process” (“Unframing” 13). More traditional formulations of the rhetorical situation overlook the fluidity and emergence of rhetoric; they don’t explain how rhetoric spreads, moves, or how it’s generative. In these scholars’ recharacterizations of the rhetor’s role and situation, it seems emotions and affects are dispersed across people, things, and environments. Assemblage theory, as I suggested in the previous chapter, might best capture the interrelated, emergent nature of situations, along with the role of affect. Theorizing a rhetorical situation as an assemblage highlights how nonhuman variables in the situation also hold an event together.

With Deleuze and Guattari’s assemblage theory, through the process of double articulation, we can see the becoming of mass hysteria. In the first articulation, variables—life experience, exposure, chemicals, bones, tendons, vocal chords, etc.—become organized in such a way to give rise to the symptom, and the actual symptom, the expression, is the second articulation. Through double articulation, bodily symptoms emerge, and through territorialization, the symptoms are recognized as an expression of hysteria; \(^{62}\) then, as more girls exhibit symptoms, they are grouped into a collective of hysterical girls, which in turn attracts the attention of other assemblages (health departments, school boards, conspirators, etc.). The assemblage of girls grew as more began taking on

\(^{62}\) “Hysterical symptoms” are, of course, not fixed. Historian Edward Shorter (1993) suggests that symptoms of hysterical disorders adapt based on cultural acceptance; for example, swooning was prominent in the 18\(^{th}\) century, fits and paralysis in the 19\(^{th}\) century, and eating disorders and chronic fatigue in the 20\(^{th}\) century. Similarly, feminist scholar Rachel Maines (1999) suggests that eating disorders, for example were once considered hysterical but have since been deemed an independent disease (8).
the symptoms (affects) of other girls. Even Dominus, in her exposé, describes the spread of the illness in terms of joining a social group (or assemblage). The first girls to fall ill, she describes, were those of higher social status (cheerleaders and honor roll students) and those who developed the symptoms later (who joined the assemblage later) tended to be of lower social status in the high school. She writes, “Mass psychogenic illness, whatever its mysterious mechanism, seems deeply connected to empathy and to a longing for what social psychologists call affiliation: belonging.” Taking on the symptoms of someone else (joining the assemblage) is a way of empathizing and belonging.\(^63\)

A theory of rhetorical assemblages allows us to see how parts of this event that we might previously have studied as external to the event—namely news and social media—became part of the event itself. At first glance, we can see the role of the news media was to report the event, providing the girls, families, and community alternate explanations of the syndrome. But this reporting also influenced the possible outcomes of this case (will the girls accept particular diagnoses or not), and in the case of social media, allowed the girls to document symptoms, debate diagnoses, and also open themselves up as a site for public commentary. News and social media played a much larger role in this event than has been documented in other cases of mass hysteria. In a historical and psychological analysis, Robert Bartholomew, Simon Wessely, G James Rubin

\(^63\) Neurologists might explain this using a theory of mirror neurons, which suggests that we unconsciously mimic those around us, but perhaps most those with whom was want to identify. For an analysis of mirror neurons' role in mass hysteria, see Yao-Tung Lee and Shih-Jen Tsai (2010).
suggest the case illustrates what might be a new way of transmitting mass psychogenic illness:

We may be witnessing a milestone in the history of MPI where the primary agent of spread will be the Internet and social media networks. Communication with the neurologists treating 12 of the victims supports this view. ‘As soon as the media coverage stopped, they all began to rapidly improve and are doing very well,’ they report. At the time of writing, all but one of their patients ‘are free of tics and vocalizations.’ (511)

In a traditional rhetorical analysis of this case, we might have studied the news media as having an independent, external role in reporting and sensationalizing this case. However, as many of the physicians involved in the case suggested, the news media became part of the syndrome itself. Dominus also highlights the intersecting parties (assemblages) that came together in the creation of the story: “Now, though, the girls’ writhing and stuttering suggested something troubling, either arising from within the community or being perpetrated on it, a mystery that proved irresistible for onlookers, whose attention would soon become part of the story itself.” Dominus describes how the attention the girls gained from the general public contributed to the worsening and progression of the syndrome. In this way, the various commentaries from “onlookers” were taken on (actually subsumed in the assemblage of the girls’ bodies) and then responded to, in many cases, with worsening symptoms (changing affects).

Interestingly, though, the girls also used social media in a way that some described as an effort to control the portrayal of their syndrome. This also
contributed to the way the symptoms spread, as David Lichter, professor of neurology at the University of Buffalo, who treated some of the girls, told MSNBC in an interview:

It’s remarkable to see how one individual posts something, and then the next person who posts something not only are the movements bizarre and not consistent with known movement disorders, but it’s the same kind of movements. This mimicry goes on with Facebook or YouTube exposure. This is the modern way that symptomology could be spread. (Velasquez)

If we look at the actual illness and symptoms as rhetorical, as I’ve suggested, an understanding of the rhetorical situation must extend to consider social media not external to the bodily manifestation of the illness, but to see how it joined the assemblage of the illness. Through the connections that social media allows, the physical, biologic symptoms were spread remotely—through what we might call an assemblage of the bodily, material, networked, affective.

Studying rhetoric in terms of assemblages allows us to see how events can be held together by things or actions that might not traditionally be considered rhetorical, for example, the tic. In the assemblage of the girl’s body, the tic prompts family and friends to be concerned; it is the reason doctors and experts enter the story, bringing in an entire medical assemblage with various histories of treatment. When the news media assemblage joins, each station/show (with its own approaches, tactics in dealing with the portrayal of the tic), render the tic for its viewing audience. While the growing attention to the tics made the symptoms worse and more pronounced as the assemblages were growing together, when the
tics stopped, the event itself broke down; the news media dropped away, girls no longer became afflicted, the parental assemblage no longer reached out for answers, the high school administration no longer investigated, and the girls were no longer bound in the same way. Studying this case rhetorically means looking beyond voluntary, conscious forms of persuasion, to also think about how objects, affects, and bodies are persuading us.

What’s particularly interesting about the assemblage for studies of emotion is how emotion propels not just the discourse of the event but is also part of the development of the syndrome itself. Studying hysteria as an assemblage, we can see how the emotional looping of doubt and mistrust often fuels symptoms; emotions almost seem like a separate agent in the assemblage, as they work to both intensify, and fuel skepticism toward, symptoms. Dominus describes the doubt surrounding the diagnosis in the community: “To many parents, the diagnosis was woefully inadequate, even insulting. ‘It’s a very hard pill for me to swallow—what are we, living in the 1600s?’ the guardian of one of the girls said.” Similarly, Nicholas Jackson in *The Atlantic*, described the LeRoy community’s response to the diagnosis: “And yet many continue to question the diagnosis; they can’t seem to take conversion disorder seriously.” This doubt is what several doctors suggested was fueling the development and worsening of the symptoms. Freud even describes this phenomenon in his treatment of Dora,

---

64 Chelsey Dumars, one of the suffering girls describes her debilitating symptoms paired with her perceptions that the community is doubting her: “I couldn’t stop stuttering. And then throughout the day, I got worse, and I started twitching and everything. I hate when it happens because my body is sore. Sometimes it gets me to the point where I want to cry from twitching so much . . . Like I said, I don’t like even going into stores, because I feel like people are staring at me and making fun of me.”
suggesting that when the hysteric is surrounded by people who doubt and mistrust her, she consumes those emotions and her physical symptoms are, arguably, a response. Dora’s father told Freud her symptoms resulted from “a phantasy that has forded its way into her mind” rather than a legitimate trauma (41). This doubt, Freud asserts, magnified Dora’s symptoms. The syndrome itself often arises and subsists because of an inability to make narrative sense of trauma, as psychiatrists Howard Waitzkin and Holly Magana observed in “The Black Box in Somatization; Unexplained Physical Symptoms, Culture and Narratives of Trauma.” When Waitzkin and Magana received an influx of patients who had migrated to the U.S. from war-torn countries in Central America suffering from somatic symptoms without physical disease, they set out to better understand the root of these symptoms. The inability to construct a coherent narrative, they suggest, often heightens symptoms: “the mechanism by which trauma is transformed into somatic symptoms often involves an incoherence in narrative structure, because of which the traumatic experience cannot be told as a coherent whole” (818). Several of the news stories about the girls hint at their underlying personal trauma: absent fathers, debilitating parental illness, poverty, teen pregnancy, etc. When so many in the community were unable to make sense

---

65 Here, Freud suggests hysteria is a phenomenon neither contained in the mind nor body but that it is held together by a number of influences: Dora’s interactions with the source of her anxiety (a family friend who made an unwanted sexual advance), her interaction (or lack thereof) with peers, and even her therapy with Freud. He explains hysterical symptoms require psychical significance or meaning and somatic compliance: “hysterical symptoms are the expression of their most secret and repressed wishes” (22). Thus, Freud’s treatment of hysteria involved an investigation into the psyche—both uncovering the root of the symptoms and convincing the patient that the symptoms have purpose.
of the symptoms (especially in the case of denying the diagnosis), the girls were prevented from believing that whatever underlying psychological issues they might be dealing with were legitimate and worthy of serious attention. Viewing this case of mass hysteria in terms of assemblages allows us to see these emotions and the role of social and news media as central (rhetorical) parts of the event itself—rather than external forces.

Rhetorical Bodies

Following a Spinozist theory of defining bodies by their affects allows us to see how (human and nonhuman) bodies are persuasive. As I’ve already noted, there’s a way in which the physical bodies of the girls in LeRoy persuaded themselves, those around them, and viewers. Dominus describes this kind of persuasion by highlighting the “language”—the symptoms—the girls use:

As their parents and the media and town officials conducted a conversation all around them, the girls in Le Roy seemed to be sharing a language that maybe even they did not fully understand. That so many people in town were more preoccupied with environmental waste than the homes of the affected young people suggests that their message may have been hard for some of the adults to hear, too.

---

66 We can see this sentiment in comments from some of the girls. For example, Traci Leunbar, reported, “A lot of people say we are faking it”; Thera Sanchez illustrates her own doubt with the diagnosis: “I don’t think this is in my head. I don’t think I can wake up from a nap and this can happen.”
Dominus points to the rhetorical purpose of the symptoms, that there was something the girls were trying to express—something they couldn’t express verbally—that reflected the economic and cultural state of the town itself.  

Viewing these symptoms as rhetorical recognizes the syndrome as purposeful and the girls as agents, not just as passive vessels—how hysterics have been studied historically. Even the way the girls turned to the news media (acknowledging the possible rhetorical affects of that body) illustrates an awareness of their rhetorical possibilities in this event. As Bartholomew, Wessely, and Rubin put it: “This is the first case in which, to our knowledge, those affected have been able to ‘put their case’ directly to the wider public” (511). To return to the notion of “affective agency” discussed in the last chapter, there’s a way in which the girls try to “reconfigure the entanglements” (to use Barad’s terms) of their story. This move to take control of their own narrative, may have backfired to some extent given the way the syndrome spread via social media, yet this is an example of using one’s affects to change one’s own body and the public discourse surrounding the case. We can read the girls’ affects—bodily, mediated, and otherwise—as rhetorical.

While it might seem unethical to read or assign purposes to another person’s body, ignoring what bodies might be saying, in some cases, seems equally risky. Recently, scholars have argued that we expand our rhetorical scope to study unintentional texts and discourses, like objects, animals, and things, yet bodily processes are rarely considered rhetorical. Perhaps this is because of the

---

67 As Dominus and others described in their reports of this story, the town of LeRoy, once a booming manufacturing town, is now struggling with higher rates of poverty, unemployment, and single-parent households.
politics surrounding the study of human bodies. We know that this can quickly become dangerous, as we can see, for example, in ancient theories of hysteria, which were based on the belief that wombs were wandering around women’s bodies.\textsuperscript{68} Plato\textsuperscript{69} and several Hippocratic authors thought the womb was capable of strangling or suffocating a woman as it moved around her body. To avoid this, Christopher Faraone writes in “Magical and Medical Approaches to the Wandering Womb in the Ancient Greek World,” women were encouraged to marry young and have many children to always keep the womb in place. The womb was described variously as a sentient being, a wild animal, or a defective organ; in a Greek Magical Handbook from 4 CE, the womb is even described as biting and chewing the insides. In the case of a wandering womb, physicians often tried to persuade it back into place with fumigations (foul ones at the nose and sweet smelling at the vagina) or loud noises. Despite how bizarre these ideas now seem, we still talk about “hostile” wombs or cervixes whose intentions are to prevent fertilization and incubation, similarly implying that the cervix has its own motives and functions separate from the rest of the body. We often talk about our human bodies in rhetorical terms, saying things like “my body is trying to tell me something.”

To really take up the calls of complexity, assemblage, and affect theories means paying attention to what might seem to be involuntary or coincidental. As is made so clear in the way the LeRoy girls’ symptoms are variously analyzed and

\textsuperscript{68} The “wandering womb” was frequently blamed for hysterical symptoms in ancient times. Before human dissections, physicians had no way of knowing where wombs were located.

\textsuperscript{69} Some scholars have debated this. See, for example, Mark Adair’s “Plato’s View of the ‘Wandering Uterus.’”
portrayed, these symptoms mean something. In keeping with my analysis of a tic, we can see how it might be a call for psychological help and perhaps a call for social acceptance among a group of girls. The tic is an exigence (in Bitzer’s terms “an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle”), but it’s also a constraint for the girl’s body. The tic is an argument that many other bodies responded to in different ways given their purposes: to highlight environmental concerns, the personal struggles of the girls, the (il)legitimacy of doctors and other experts, etc. Accepting something like a tic as rhetorical suggests that any body (human or not) can persuade; we no longer need the conscious and intentional rhetor.

If we accepted that any body or thing can persuade, there’s a way in which everything is rhetorical, every becoming, every combining of parts would be rhetorical. This aligns with those who’ve argued rhetoricity and affects precede us. For example, Diane Davis suggests in *Inessential Solidarity*, there is an affectability that precedes symbolicity and is necessary for persuasion to take place. Similarly Rickert (2013) echoes Davis when he asserts affect and persuadability is “the condition of the possibility for rhetoric’s emergence” (159). These claims become especially apparent then we decide to study an event like the one in LeRoy rhetorically. The rhetoric in this event doesn’t appear just in the discourses that emerged when various parties debated about this “mystery illness.” Even the news media picked up on the “language” of the girls’ symptoms, suggesting that the illness itself was persuasive, rhetorical.

A close study of this case encourages us to question not just what we define as rhetorical, but also the role of affects and emotions. We can see, for
example, with the theory of fire objects how defining a rhetorical object calls forth particular emotional realities. Paying attention to the various versions of mass hysteria at work in this case reveals not just the obvious emotions at work—fear, pity, sadness—but also emotions attached to the girls’ sense of belonging and the questioning of their symptoms’ legitimacy. Similarly, the way that news and social media become part of this syndrome (this assemblage) reflects the power of media to produce and transmit affects and emotions in a way that hasn’t really been seen before. The doubt and mistrust that spread through those networks was consumed by and reflected in the syndrome itself, ultimately helping to determine which diagnosis the girls accepted and which treatment they sought.
As emotions were the first motives which induced man to speak, his first utterances were tropes (metaphors). Figurative language was the first to be born, proper meanings were the last to be found.

Rousseau captures the tension at the heart of this dissertation: emotions are the impetus for language, communication, and expression of human experience, yet language is never enough to capture the *all* of human experience. Many scholars of emotion studies have cited this tension, claiming our lack of vocabulary or “proper meanings” prevents us from adequately theorizing the emotions. While the advent of affect theory seems to be a response to that dearth of vocabulary, as it claims to better capture the visceral, embodied, and sensual aspects of human experience, the pursuit of “proper meanings” often seems to be a distraction in itself. This distraction—specifically debates over terminology and theoretical tradition—prevents us from the kinds of insights that might emerge if, rather than beginning with static definitions and seeking out evidence of their existence, we begin our rhetorical studies, as Massumi suggests, in the middle.
My main objective in this dissertation was to take seriously the call from scholars who have studied both affect and emotion in our field: to carefully (re)consider how we discuss and use both terms. Perhaps more importantly, I wanted this work to culminate in a revised theory of pathos, into a theory that would be useful—and not seemingly external—to rhetorical theory. The difficulty I faced (as have others who’ve taken up this sort of study) is figuring out how to reconcile theories of affect with rhetorical studies. I, too, was swept up in the pleasure—the exciting emotional experience—of re-thinking many of the ideas and theories that were the basis for my understanding of the world and rhetorical theory’s role therein. I wanted to figure out how to accept this way of seeing the world—seeing the world through its relations rather than as consisting of independent entities—in a way that would help me and others become better rhetoricians. I quickly realized this would not be an easy task, and though in many ways, I’ve only just begun (as I end) this project, in this postscript, I’ll outline some of the main tenets of a revised theory of pathos and look forward to consider what future research might address.

A revised theory of pathos should 1) accept that affect and emotion are intimately related, 2) acknowledge the numerous theories of affect and emotion that might be used for differing rhetorical purposes, and 3) invoke an understanding of rhetorical situations and events that are malleable, layered, and recursive. Returning to the arguments of my early chapters, a revised theory of pathos should resist the desire to treat affect and emotion as separate concepts that refer to fundamentally different phenomena. The most obvious problem this theoretical division creates is a fissure in the scholarship, resulting in two
seemingly separate traditions in the field with scholars who study one concept but not the other (e.g. scholars like Laura Micciche, Daniel Gross, or Michael Hyde and Craig Smith who pursue studies of emotion independent from scholarship on affect). The dearth of conversation between scholarship on affect and emotion prevents the theoretical advancement of both areas of study—and especially reconfigurations of the concept pathos in our field.

If we understand that affects and emotions are defined in numerous ways, for numerous purposes, it would seem in our best interest to examine our tendencies to rely on particular traditions and to question what blind spots might be revealed through an expanded understanding of both concepts. As I suggested in Chapter Two, there are a number of prominent affect theories (several of which I didn’t even detail in this dissertation, e.g. Lawrence Grossberg’s or Eve Sedgwick’s) that allow us to isolate different aspects of rhetoric. When someone mentions “affect” in our field, most are quick to assume it means the fleeting bodily intensity associated with Massumi. But just as there are times when Massumi’s version of affect seems most useful in isolating a particular aspect of rhetoric, there are times when an understanding of affect as exigence and constraint might produce more diverse analyses. When we make this decision—in choosing one version of affect or emotion to inform our studies—we ought to also consider which versions we are overlooking and to what ends. Might we be—purposefully or not—leaving out versions of emotion or affect that could continue to complicate (in some cases, trouble) our rhetorical investigations? In my albeit brief analysis of the case in LeRoy, I tried to employ understandings of affect and emotion that at times seemed incompatible, but in doing so, I hoped to reveal
how we might see the affects and emotions of this case as primary forces, not as after-the-fact responses to what happened in the event.

Affect theory encourages us to seek out more complicated rhetorical projects and objects of study. But we need to be careful about defining and choosing these objects, knowing that the objects we isolate are attached to affects and emotions that we also choose to foreground or not. In keeping with this sentiment, my analysis of LeRoy did not draw out finite borders of the event or focus on isolated rhetor-audience interactions. This produced a case study that, following Massumi and many other scholars I've referenced in this dissertation, was more exploratory in nature. I hoped to find the affects and emotions in this event that existed beyond and slipped between traditional discourse—to call attention to, for example, how news and social media contributed to the progression and transmission of the symptoms, emerging prior to and along with the more traditionally rhetorical aspects of this case. A truly revised theory of pathos should work against traditional humanistic approaches to rhetorical study, which means (re)considering what is rhetorical in the first place.

Looking Forward

In keeping with the longstanding ethical aims of pathos, I hope this project has created an opening to more carefully think about the ethics of studying more recent conceptualizations and theories of affect and emotion. As I emphasized in my final chapter, ethics become important when deciding what it means to identify and study particular rhetorical objects. Though there has been
no shortage of scholars who have suggested that we expand our rhetorical studies to include nontraditional texts, discourses, and objects, no one has yet considered the emotional and affective stakes of doing so. I hope that my analysis of the case in LeRoy illustrates that the ethics of pathos aren’t contained just in the ways that the news media used emotional appeals or in the way I used emotional appeals to describe the case. I hope that what also became apparent is that choosing an object of study has ethical implications for the emotions that we highlight and ignore. For example, there are emotions, among the girls themselves—desires to belong or for acknowledgement of their symptoms as legitimate—that contributed to the development of the case. Focusing our attention just on the most obvious emotions in this case—fear and pity—fails to capture its emotional and affective complexity.

As I look forward in my own studies, I’d like to more thoroughly pursue psychoanalytic theories of affect and desire. In my unfortunately brief study of psychoanalytic approaches, I realized that “desire” would likely be an important addition in a revised theory of pathos that would more extensively account for the affective investments of each of us and might give clues into how rhetoricians can better identify and make use of those investments. Because there are many central terms in psychoanalysis that describe the work of affect and emotion, this sort of study would begin by mapping out the relationships among concepts like enjoyment, pleasure, desire, affect, and emotion.

The final opening I hope this dissertation has produced is for rhetorical analyses of how emotions and affects are biologically experienced and transmitted. Perhaps most closely related to Massumi’s understanding of affect
as bodily intensity, these analyses would be useful in better investigating how we might consider biological processes as rhetorical. Teresa Brennan’s *The Transmission of Affect* is an incredible work that takes many of the first steps in considering how affects are transmitted biologically and relatedly how affects play a primary role in agency and persuasion. The “transmission of affect,” she suggests “capture[s] a process that is social in origin but biological and physical in effect” (3). Her theory accounts for the physiological aspects of affect (hormones and pheromones passed between us), but also recognizes these processes as inextricably social—an understanding that seems especially important for studying rhetorical events that emerge through biological, social, mediated, and discursive interactions.

Further study into the biological transmission of affect would also encourage us to focus our attention on the role of the senses. Brennan suggests that we rely on all our senses (especially smell) to produce knowledge. However, contemporary theories of the “self-contained individual,” she asserts, prevent us from acknowledging the role affect plays in knowledge-making and other processes we often consider to be solely cognitive. Like many others cited in this dissertation, Brennan suggests a major obstacle in theorizing affect is the lack of language and vocabulary to sufficiently describe affective experience:

At present we only have a rudimentary language for connecting sensations, affects, and words, for connecting bodily processes and the conceptual understanding of them. The development of that language requires an attention to the pathways of sensation in the body, and attention that is more concentrated and sustained than
the attention received by the body hitherto. This is the precondition of beginning to formulate bodily knowledge more accurately and to pass it on by the verbal means that increases the rapidity of human understanding. (153)

Focusing our attention on “pathways of sensation in the body” has potential not just for better understandings of bodily knowledge; these pathways are avenues for communication and persuasion. Further studies might consider the role these pathways play in rhetorical relations—especially as they contribute to the production, expression, and experience of emotion.


Shorter, Edward. *From Paralysis to Fatigue: A History of Psychosomatic Illness*


Julie D. Nelson

Department of English
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee
3243 N. Downer Ave.
Milwaukee, WI 53201

Education

Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 2014
Committee: Dennis Lynch (Chair), Anne Wysocki, Alice Gillam, Lane Hall, and Byron Hawk
Dissertation: “Phantom Rhetorics: From Pathos to Affect”

M.A. in English with Rhetoric and Composition focus, Ohio University, 2009
Committee: Jennie Nelson (Chair), Mara Holt, and Jackie Glasgow
Thesis: “Theories of Composing in First-Year Composition: Divergent Student and Instructor Views of Writing”

B.A. in English with a Writing Concentration, Augsburg College, 2006
Thesis: “Recontextualizing the Theory, Feminism, and Canonization of Virginia Woolf”

Teaching Experience

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of English, University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 2009-present
Courses Taught:
- English 101: Introduction to College Writing
- English 102: College Writing and Research
- English 102 Online: College Writing and Research
- English 215: Introduction to English Studies
- English 230: Writing with Style
- English 240: Rhetoric, Writing, Culture: Rhetorics of Affect and Emotion
- English 701: Teaching College Composition (co-taught w/ Dennis Lynch)

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of English, Ohio University, 2007-2009
Courses Taught:
- English 151: Rhetoric and Writing I
- English 153: Visual Rhetoric
- English 306J: Women and Writing
- English 308J: Rhetoric and Writing II

Administrative Positions

Mentor for Faculty Teaching Composition Online, UWM, 2013
Mentor for Graduate Teaching Assistants in English, UWM, 2010-2013
Member, Writing Program Administration, UWM, 2010-2013
Member, Composition Advisory Committee, UWM, 2010-2013
Awards
Chancellor’s Award, UWM English Department, 2012, 2013
James A. Sappenfield Fellowship, UWM English Department, 2013
UWM Graduate School Travel Award, 2010-2012
UWM Center for Women’s Studies Graduate Research Paper Award, 2nd place, 2010

Publication

National Conference Presentations
“Persuasive Bodies and Phantom Rhetorics,” Rhetoric Society of America, San Antonio, TX, May 2014.

Regional Conference Presentations
“Student Writing as Performance of Self,” Marquette University Graduate Student Conference, Milwaukee, WI, December 2009.
UWM English Department Presentations

“Using Blogs for Reflective Writing in FYC,” English Department Orientation for Online Teaching, August 2013.

“What Does It Mean to Critically Interpret?” English Department Graduate Teaching Assistant Orientation, August 2012.

“Getting Ready for the Classroom: Sample Student Texts,” English Department Graduate Teaching Assistant Orientation, August 2011.


“Working with Course Goals,” Co-presented with Nic Learned, English Department Graduate Teaching Assistant Orientation, August 2010.

Service

Judge, Virginia Burke Writing Contest, UWM, 2013
Reader, UWM Writing Program Assessment, 2010-2013
Member, First-Year Reader Committee, UWM, 2010, 2012
Member, Ohio University Graduate Student Advisory Committee for Issues in College Teaching, 2007-2009
Reader, Ohio University Writing Program Assessment, 2009

Additional Professional Experience


Professional Memberships

Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric and Composition
College Composition and Communication
National Council of Teachers of English
Rhetoric Society of America