

Habit and Affect: Revitalizing a Forgotten History

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Abstract

Habit is an integral concept for body studies, a hybrid concept and one that has provided the bedrock across the humanities for considering the interrelationships between movement and stasis, being and becoming, and process and fixity. Habits are seen to provide relay points between what is taken to be inside and outside, disrupting any clear and distinct boundary between nature and culture, self and other, the psychological and social, and even mind and matter. Habit thus discloses a paradox. It takes up a unique position in affect modulation, which encompasses both regulation (in the form of discipline) and also extends the body's potential for engaging the new, change and creativity. In order to understand the basis of the ambivalent duality governing understandings of habit it is argued that a genealogical approach to this question is necessary. This will be located within the recent 'turn to affect' and histories of conation within the psychological sciences, particularly taking the writings of William McDougall as a focus.

Keywords

affect, conation, embodiment, habit, William McDougall, mediation, psychic research, psychology

Reflections on habits have a long lineage, appearing across theological, philosophical, criminological, literary, psychological and sociological discourses, and producing something of a paradox in our attempts to understand embodiment. As Gail Weiss (2008) cogently illustrates in

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her engagement with what becomes figured as ‘ordinary’ – as the invisible background to experience – habit plays a paradoxical role. Weiss (2008: 82) enacts this paradox by taking a transdisciplinary archive of writers and thinkers – literary, philosophical and psychological – who in different ways have asked, ‘How individual and cultural innovation can occur within the context of (the) habitual horizons?’

Many of the writers Weiss engages will be very familiar to *Body & Society* readers; their understandings of habit have taken up a central place within body studies. These include the theories and writings of Merleau-Ponty, Pierre Bourdieu, Gilles Deleuze and William James, whose engagements with habit have provided scholars interested in embodiment with a variety of ways of conceptualizing how social practices and relations are materialized. In her critical engagement with their diverse accounts, discussed alongside literary accounts of habit such as those we find in the writings of Marcel Proust, the question of how to explain innovation, change, creativity and transformation when habits are often taken to express what is more or even *most* resistant to change becomes a key challenge and paradox. The ambivalences that are enacted across her archive consider habits in different ways as both enhancing *and* stultifying. As she invites the reader to ponder, ‘Can habit keep “an old dog from learning new tricks”? Or is habit precisely what provides a necessary foundation for new meanings to emerge?’ (Weiss, 2008: 77). It is this paradox that will be the subject of my article.

The question Weiss raises often divides accounts of habit in which the ambivalences are produced according to an oppositional series of dualities, which she argues are often seen to divide key figures of the 19th and 20th centuries. These include a focus on instinct versus learned behaviour, animal versus the human, nature versus culture and mechanism versus vitalism. What we see are almost two competing epistemes, which bring together different assemblages of concepts: genes, neuronal activity, instincts, etc. In the background, at the level of ontology, we can also find appeals to materialism versus appeal to some anti-materialist animating principle or process. These dualities are carried through into the 21st century, particularly within the neurosciences, where debates about habit often refer to either conscious versus unconscious thought or action. Arguments within some neuroscientific accounts attempt to account for consciousness with reference to neuronal activity alone (see Rose, forthcoming). However, one of the aims of Weiss’s account of key figures

associated with habit is to demonstrate that these dualities are not so clear-cut, particularly when we consider the histories of the debates that are marshalled by accounts of habit. We can clearly see how a focus on sedimentation *and* creativity as mutually constitutive processes is central to the histories of accounts of habit that have taken up a central place within body studies.

The paradox of habit is carried through into more recent work on affect (see Blackman, 2012; Blackman and Venn, 2010), where habit takes up a unique position in affect modulation (Massumi, 2002). This encompasses attention to regulation (in the form of discipline) and also to how habits extend the body's potential for engaging the new, change and creativity (see Clough and Wilse, 2011; Grosz, 2004 and in this volume). As we will see, and as Weiss (2008: 97) argues, the problem of habit, and the tension between sedimentation and transformation, is often posed agonistically, with different accounts prioritizing one or other of habit's dimensions. This is rather than posing 'transformation and sedimentation as mutually constitutive phenomena'. The importance of this recognition will be followed through in this article by taking the writings of the British social psychologist, William McDougall (1871–1938) as a focus. As we will see, McDougall is often associated with developing a theory of instincts, placing habit as an important component of the disciplining of bodies (see Blackman, 2007). However, when we examine the history of his writings in more detail, we will see that his work also enacted ideas and concepts more associated with neo-vitalist traditions within philosophy (see Grosz, in this volume). This disrupts the idea that psychology was solely mechanistic in its understandings of habit, which were to underlie important accounts of why psychology was later to be dismissed by sociological forms of understanding (see Camic, 1986).

I seek to show how some of the tensions within the affective turn, particularly those identified in recent interventions by Ruth Leys (2011; see also Blackman, 2012; Wetherell, 2012), can be traced back to the ambivalences enacted within McDougall's writing, which are characteristic of psychology's forgotten history (see also Blackman, 2012). The antecedents of the affective turn take us back to the unexplored connections between psychic research, Lamarckism, neo-vitalism and eugenics central to McDougall's work (see Asprey, 2010), and which I shall argue persist in contemporary accounts of

the affective capacities of bodies. Such histories illustrate habit's close relationship to discussions of telepathy, mimesis and instinct, and bring vitalism much closer to these traditions than has been acknowledged or explored. What is at stake in this recognition is the subject of the article.

The Matter of Habit

The heading for this section is taken from a seminal article written by the American sociologist, Charles Camic (1986). Camic argues that habit was largely excised from sociology after 1918, and this was particularly to do with the colonization of habit by forms of behaviourist psychology. As Camic stridently puts it, 'the concept of habit was a casualty of sociology's revolt against behaviourism' (1986: 1040). Within this framing, the institutionalization of sociology was enacted in relation to psychology and the shaping and forming of its own disciplinary boundaries and objects. One familiar way in which this boundary-work was played out is in relation to the French sociological imagination, which privileged Emile Durkheim over his contemporary, Gabriel Tarde (see Blackman, 2007; Latour, 2002). Durkheim and Tarde were both interested in imitation and contagious forms of communication which seemed to by-pass reason. However, unlike Tarde, Durkheim was hostile to modelling imitation on the basis of hypnotic suggestibility, preferring instead to see imitation as a form of social imposition or coercion.

Tarde's concepts of invention and imitation were derived from his interest in hypnotic trance, and on the basis of this he argued that suggestion was the basis of sociality itself (see Blackman, 2007; Candea, 2010). This oscillation between what Ruth Leys (1983: 7) terms mimesis and anti-mimesis was central to the way in which habit became formed as a concept. She argues that habit was stripped of its close association with more mimetic forms of communication¹ and became a form of bodily unconscious, encoded beyond 'verbal-semantic-linguistic representation'. Habit was thus refigured as having a 'mechanical-causal basis' (Leys, 1983: 7), and understood primarily as a materialist concept.

She argues that this led to suggestion being recast as a bodily automatism, with habit becoming the means of understanding all those behaviours, forms of action, thought and belief which seemed

to emanate from and between subjects, beyond their conscious control or awareness. In a similar way, Camic (1986) argues that habit is seen as referring to actions which are largely regarded as unmotivated, disclosing a common stereotype of habits as fixed, mechanical behaviours. One question that both Camic and Leys pose – in different ways – in relation to the genealogy of habit within the social sciences is the extent to which the idea of habit as having a mechanical-causal basis might be unsettled if we take seriously genealogies of habit within the psychological sciences, and how different concepts of habit were engaged across philosophy, sociology and related disciplines. Although habit came to replace mimesis in Durkheim's work, and to become primarily understood as a bio-physical concept primarily located within the nervous system, the genealogy of habit taking form within both Leys' and Camic's work disrupts this assumption. Both scholars focus on the role the psychological sciences played in habit's formation as the locus of non-intentionality (also see Leys, 2011).

What I want to do in the next section is work through some of these arguments by locating them specifically within histories of conation within the psychological sciences, and particularly in the work of William McDougall, the British social psychologist who was influenced by the work of Gabriel Tarde (see Blackman, 2007). This work is interesting because it was prior to the formation of habit as having a causal-mechanical basis, which was to take hold later within psychology, and prior to the institutionalization of psychology, sociology and philosophy as distinct disciplines. This will enact one response to Camic's (1986) call for habit to be accorded the historical status it deserves within sociological theorizing. My purpose will be to open historical reflection up to the hesitations and contestations articulating concepts of habit, which have crossed the boundaries between philosophy, psychology and sociology. The implications for body studies of engaging these debates will be important in theorizing the affective capacities of bodies.

Habit and Psychology

In a previous article I explored the specific ways in which Gabriel Tarde's writings on suggestion and imitation, referred to specifically in this article as a mimetic paradigm, were engaged, transformed and

enacted within the emerging disciplinary specialization and professionalization of social psychology (Blackman, 2007). In this article I will specifically focus on the work of William McDougall, as he consistently developed a theory of habit within his work, and also challenged the increasing mechanization that was taking place within the psychological sciences at the turn of the 20th century. My rationale for revitalizing the work of McDougall is strategic and one that is closely linked to some of the problems within many contemporary engagements with the sciences by humanities scholars, particularly within affect theories (see Callard and Papoulias, 2010). Since at least the revitalization of the work of the American psychologist Silvan Tomkins by the late cultural theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, psychology and psychological theories and theorists have been offered up as countering some of the ‘heuristic habits’ (Sedgwick and Frank, 1995: 1) of contemporary critical theory. Sedgwick (Sedgwick and Frank, 1995: 1) invites cultural theorists to consider Silvan Tomkins as a theorist whose work challenges what she terms the ‘bipolar transitive relations’ between subject/object, self/other, nature/culture. Offering what she terms a ‘rich phenomenology of emotions’ (Sedgwick and Frank, 1995: 1), which itself enacts a specific theory of habituation, Tomkins is heralded as offering the humanities a theory of affect which counters, at least at the time of Sedgwick’s writing, the humanities’ focus on representation and discourse. Since Sedgwick’s interest in Tomkins as someone who was ‘sublimely resistant’² (Sedgwick and Frank, 1995: 7) to core psychological assumptions (such as the concept of a ‘core personality’), this has opened the door to many humanities theorists, including the seminal affect theorist, Brian Massumi (2002), to make bridges with and join alliances with psychology and related disciplines, such as the contemporary neurosciences.

As Weiss (2008) also shows, key figures central to body studies, such as Pierre Bourdieu, for example, drew on particular psychological ideas and concepts in their own theories of habit and the habitus. As she argues, Bourdieu (e.g. 1992) was very influenced by the work of William James, and particularly his theorizations of habit within *The Principles of Psychology* (1890). She argues that James attempts to resolve the paradoxes of habit as both resistant and creative in his developmental account of habits as becoming more and more fixed as the person ages. Although Bourdieu departs from James, his work was very indebted to

James, and the problem of plasticity versus fixity is one that is taken through in his work and the critiques of it, particularly from more vitalist traditions, such as the work of Deleuze in *Difference and Repetition* (1994).

My reasons for revitalizing the work of one key psychologist are linked not to his particular theories and the usefulness they might have for contemporary theorizing. Rather, McDougall is a key focus because his theories enacted some of the hesitations, crossings and boundary-work enacted between philosophy, science, sociology and psychology at the turn of the 20th century. I argue that affect theory has inherited some of these hesitations, and has inadvertently taken them through in discussions of habit and affect (also see Blackman, 2012). McDougall's theories of habit were part of a neo-vitalist trend within psychology, which produced 'a philosophical basis for a non-mechanistic, anti-materialist view of life and mind' (Valentine, 2012b: 82). These views in large part were derived from his interest in psychic research, which is now being given more prominence in understanding the fluidity of the boundaries between psychology and psychical research until at least the early 20th century (see Valentine, 2012b). There was also a strong connection between psychic research and neo-vitalism, exemplified by the writings of Henri Bergson, William James and Gabriel Tarde, and I will argue that understanding these connections takes us into the present and the paradox of habit outlined in the introduction to this article.

William McDougall (1871–1938)

William McDougall has been described by the British philosopher of science, Graham Richards (2008) as enacting a form of social psychology that seems very unfamiliar and strange when we consider the heuristic habits of contemporary social psychology. This is despite the fact that his book, *An Introduction to Social Psychology* (McDougall, 1910) was the 'most successful British authored psychology book every published' (Richards, 2008: 654). The only other pre-1910 book that was to reach such heights, Richards (2008: 654) states, is William James' *Principles of Psychology* (1890), which is probably more familiar to readers than McDougall's treatise. McDougall has largely been forgotten but his marginalization should not be equated with his true significance in contemporary

understandings of habit, and particularly neo-vitalist traditions which might enact a strict boundary between philosophy, sociology and psychology. His work is much richer than the phenomenology of emotions within the theories of Silvan Tomkins, and he included a wider range of complex and subtle emotions ‘than most subsequent psychologists tackle’ (Richards, 2008: 655). There are clear antecedents from Tomkins to McDougall’s work, but that will be the subject of another article.

McDougall’s significance in neo-vitalist traditions has undergone something of a revival in recent writings by historians of psychology such as Elizabeth Valentine (2012a) and historians interested in the relationships between psychical research and the psychological sciences (Asprem, 2010). My own work has also taken an interest in the archive of theories, concepts and forms of verification and legitimation enacted across the boundaries of philosophy, psychology, literature and science within psychological laboratories at the turn of the 20th century. This work is interesting for exploring the antecedents of recent work on the performativity of experimentation that we might find in the work of Karen Barad (2007), for example, and which cross art and science in the context of the turn to affect (Blackman, 2012). These ‘psychological’ archives were transdisciplinary, the boundaries between disciplines were fluid and, as Asprem (2010: 123) argues, McDougall’s theories were characterized more by a ‘nice arrangement of heterodoxies’ than by any unified theory of instinct or habit. What is of interest is what this work can offer to understandings of mediation, affect and embodiment (see Blackman, 2012).

McDougall’s career took interesting twists and turns important for understanding the basis of his theories. He was the president of the American Society for Psychical Research from 1920 to 1921, having emigrated to the USA due to his dislike of the English climate. He was a qualified doctor and practised hypnotism while at Oxford prior to moving to the USA, and also held a post at University College London. He was a keen public intellectual, regularly writing for the press and taking part in radio broadcasts. As Valentine (2012b: 84) suggests, he crossed the divide between academia and the popular sphere, illustrating the ‘interplay between the professional and the popular’. He saw out his career at Duke University, where he set up the first parapsychology laboratory, which was developed by

McDougall's student, Joseph Banks Rhine (1895–1980), who is credited with founding the contemporary discipline of parapsychology (see Aspren, 2010). The focus on McDougall also tells us something very interesting about the increasing role of psychology within strategies of governance and regulation as part of its professionalization and boundary-making. This takes us beyond simply exploring McDougall's theories of habit as a history of ideas or a conceptual analysis, to explore the role psychology played in histories of the social as developed in the writings of Nikolas Rose and related perspectives (see Henriques et al., 1984).

McDougall, like Gabriel Tarde (1903), was interested in the concepts of repetition and imitation, and cites Tarde as a central influence in one of the questions which framed his analyses; of the 'copying by one individual of the actions, the bodily movements, of another' (Tarde, 1903: 102). When we consider McDougall's (1910) writings in their historical specificity, we can clearly see that 'the theory of two factors' (Despret, 2004: 107) – the idea of nature and culture as two separate and distinct realms – had not been stabilized within psychology. An engagement with the hesitations, contradictions and paradoxes within psychology offers possibilities of creative appropriation and reinvention, as well as mapping the specific governmental trajectories within which habit took form as a target and object of bio-political strategies.

McDougall's writings can be situated within the circuits of legitimation, authorization and contestation over what is mutable and immutable about human and non-human conduct. His articulations of habit and instinct took form within a context of debate, experimentation and discipline-building which was marked above all by eclecticism, cross-fertilization and a focus on a common range of experiences and practices which were linked through what were taken to be their apparent breaches of bodily and mental functions.³ This included a focus on mediumship, telepathy and other forms of psychical experience, hypnotic induction, the problem of the crowd and the problem of psychopathology. The latter included a specific focus on forms of dissociative experience, such as multiple personality and hysteria. These experiences formed the backdrop to the writings of philosophers, psychologists and sociologists of the time, many of whom are currently being revitalized within discussions of process-ontologies and affect (see Blackman, 2008a, 2010).

McDougall produced a diverse range of writings which in different ways developed his originary treatise on social psychology published in 1910 in his book, *An Introduction to Social Psychology*. This treatise was developed further in relation to the mind/body problem (McDougall, 1911), the problem of the crowd or group mind (1927a), psychopathology (1926), and character and the conduct of life (1927b), to name a few of his social psychological reflections. Although associated with developing a ‘theory of instincts’, and thus being concerned with more materialist conceptions of human life, this historical framing irons out and covers over the complexities and hesitations governing his own theories and concepts. This is no more so than when we look to McDougall’s theories of instinct, their indebtedness to the work of Gabriel Tarde (1903) and the concomitant place of habit within these formulations.

How Do the Many Act as One?

Tarde (1903), according to Jones and Gerard (1967), was interested in cultural and statistical regularity expressed through a notion of *habit*, which referred to those mechanisms through which uniformity within a particular culture (observed through dress and manners, for example) was spread. The notion of habit was not a psychological disposition, but the means through which innovation might transmit through a kind of imitative rapidity; what he termed ‘invention through following’ (Toews, 2003: 85). This ‘radical symmetry among all items in the field of social action, including persons and objects’ (2003: 83) was not due to the triumph of will or the volition of human or non-human actors. It is better described as due to *invention* and the coming together of elements (for example, customs) in a manner of resemblance due to repetition. As we can see, the paradox of habit is central to Tarde’s theories, with habit referring to custom, sedimentation, discipline through repetition, as well as providing the conditions of possibility for the new, creativity and innovation (see Barry and Thrift, 2007). Transported to a more contemporary horizon, Tarde is credited with the development of ‘an affect-based collective phenomenon’ or a ‘socio-psychic account of contagion’ (Toews, 2003: 92).

Tarde proposed two main mechanisms for explaining contagious communication; *invention* and *imitation*. Invention as a concept

enabled Tarde to link a notion of genius – ‘a spark of originality’ (FPS, 1909: 328) – with the propagation of ideas by particular individuals. These were individuals who were authorized to speak and credited with social prestige, as well as expressing a particular biological imperative. Although Tarde, as Latour (2004: 120) argues, was a champion of the idea of the network, exploring how patterns or regularities were ‘assemblages of many interlocking monads’, what has been given less attention is the ‘fit’ or compatibility of his ideas with Darwinism. Latour (2004: 128) does describe Tarde’s monadology as a ‘brand of metaphysical Darwinism’, but does not give adequate detail of the ways in which particular evolutionary ideas from psychology were being assembled within his account (see Blackman, 2007). The question of the spread of ideas through imitation and routinized through habit and custom was an attempt to combine selection and creation. In relation to this Tarde also turned to the work of the eugenicist, Francis Galton (1892), and particularly his treatise on *Hereditary Genius*. This enabled him to link invention with variation in ability or genius, which was seen to provide the fertile soil from which great ideas would spring forth.

Galton produced an ‘architecture of the primitive’ (Bennett, 2010), which reflected his own eugenics thinking; races and classes were ranked in a developmental hierarchy from the so-called higher to the lower. This typology combined a set of fears about the threat of different races/classes to the nation’s intelligence (particularly in relation to the declining birth rate of the middle classes) with an idea of merit or value (social worth). Of course, Tarde was a product of his time, and Social Darwinism was increasingly put forward in eugenics strategies as the means, at the end of the 19th century, to relieve the problems of unemployment, poverty and conditions of life, such as the problem of madness, and its amelioration through the emerging sciences of psychiatry and psychology (Blackman, 2001; Castell, 1988; Donnelly, 1983; Gordon, 1992; Rose, 1985). Tarde also drew on neurological conceptions of the time, which presented the brain as having a plasticity: as ‘an organ for repeating and multiplying the nervous disturbances transmitted to it at any point of its substance, and thence radiating in all directions’ (FPS, 1909: 145). This plasticity was seen to become more and more fixed over time, linked to neurological understandings of reflex pathways, which can also be found in William James’ accounts of habit

(see Weiss, 2008). Thus functional flexibility was overlaid with the imposition of limits.

These limits were those set by the inherited or constitutional stock of the individual, which were specified through emerging ideas from evolutionary biology. Thus both invention and imitation could be hindered by ability, which was used as a concept to explain which ideas/practices tended to spread, from whom to whom. 'If an invention requires higher capacity than the people can produce, according to their own scale of variation, that people will never make such an invention' (Tarde, 1903: 169). It is this aspect of Tarde's theories that were felt to be the least adequately developed at the time of his writing (1903: 134), and which led McDougall (1910) both to cite Tarde as an influence on his particular brand of social psychology, and also to develop this through his 'instinctual approach' to the basis of human life. Thus, for McDougall (1910: 342) imitation tends to spread 'from upper to middle classes' and is linked to a civilizing ethos. He cites the imitation of western Europe by Japan as an exemplar of 'the imitation of one people by another', which, he argued, 'has been a principal condition of the progress of civilisation' (1910: 339).

McDougall argued that it was not possible to address the problem of socialization, as it came to be known within social psychology (see Henriques et al., 1984), without developing a theory of the kinds of motivational impulses which drive people towards certain forms of action or conduct, rather than others. He situated himself both in relation to and in opposition to moral philosophy and theories of the moral faculty or sentiment. He was also critical of what he saw as the replacement of this pre-psychological realm with a notion of will, which, as Sedgwick (1994: 134) notes, in the 19th century was increasingly used to refer to an 'absolutized space of *pure* voluntariness'. Importantly, he also increasingly positioned his work as a counter to the rise of mechanist psychology, which reduced human conduct and behaviour to the brain, understood through concepts located within physiology, physics and chemistry (McDougall, 1911). Copying or imitation was not a mechanical process, and in this respect McDougall's theories were more influenced by ideas of hypnotic suggestion, telepathy and modes of transmission understood and enacted within psychic research of the time.

Suggestion and the telepathic idea of ‘action at a distance’ invoked the possibility of non-conscious or trans-conscious motivation; of how people might be compelled to act in ways which by-pass conscious control and reflection. However, suggestion and telepathy also operated according to thresholds of possibility, raising the question of how to understand the mediation of suggestive processes (see Blackman, 2012). One popular response to this problematic was to be found in the writings of Gustave Le Bon (1922), a French Royalist, who aligned suggestion to degeneracy (see Blackman, 2012). McDougall’s theories were a concatenation of these disparate elements brought together in relation to what he termed the problem of disposition (McDougall, 1911: 19). This concept brought together what he termed ‘two lines of scientific study [which] have seemed entirely distinct and perhaps even opposed in spirit’ (McDougall, 1922: 58–9, quoted in Asprey, 2010: 136) – *psychical research* and *eugenics*. The apparent contradictions between materialism and anti-materialist concepts are integral to his study of habit and instincts (McDougall, 1911: 19), which he defined as the ‘essential springs or motive powers of all thought and action’. Although McDougall is often credited with championing nature, his account weaves together nature and nurture in ways which are an interesting precursor to contemporary theories of affect in social theory, and particularly those which draw from the work of the American psychologist, Silvan Tomkins (see Gibbs, 2008; Sedgwick, 2003).⁴

In McDougall’s reflections on the mind/body problem (more usually referred to as the psycho-physical problem), the close relationship of habit to neo-vitalism and psychic research is clearly visible (McDougall, 1911). The book, *Body and Mind* (2011: viii) sets itself up as a critical survey of the history of animism: the idea that all natural objects are moved by spirits or what McDougall preferred to refer to as ‘an animating principle’. This book was positioned as a counter to the increasing predominance of mechanism and materialism within psychology (specifically the work of Alexander Bain and Herbert Spencer), and as performing a dialogue with subliminal psychology.⁵ One of the specific background debates that McDougall was engaging was the work of Frederic Myers (1904), who argued that human personality is not wholly destroyed by death (see Blackman, 2008a, 2010, for more detail). Luckhurst (2002) argues in the conclusion to his genealogy of telepathy that the claim that the

personality could survive death was one that pushed telepathy to the periphery, taking up residency within the psychological sciences as a marginalized sub-discipline, parapsychology,⁶ rationalized under a newly emerging concept of ESP (extra-sensory perception). The shift of telepathy to the margins is hugely important for understanding what is being missed in contemporary understandings of habit and the oppositional accounts which tend to characterize its afterlife.

In McDougall's engagement with these debates, he rejected the assumption contained within mechanistic psychology that the physico-chemical constitution of the nervous system can explain the 'actions of man' (1911: 112). As well as an engagement with Bergson's (1911) arguments in *Matter and Memory*, which challenged the assumption within mechanistic paradigms that memory can be equated to habit (as a reflex action aligned to repetition), he took seriously the empirical evidence that had been amassed by the Society for Psychical Research that 'human personality may and does survive in some sense and degree the death of the body' (1911: 347). He was adamant that the evidence that had been established could not be understood by mechanism or parallelism (the idea that there is a strict parallel between psychic processes and physical processes in the brain), and that this research pointed towards a more telepathic concept of transmission. Thus mimetic forms of communication were seen to underlie such diverse phenomena as hypnotic trance, pure memory (in the Bergsonian sense), personality, stigmata, automatic writing, double-personality and so forth.

His concept of the psycho-physical incorporates this concept of affective or telepathic transfer such that both instincts and habits retain their lineage with neo-vitalist and psychic, or what I will term trans-subjective ontologies of personhood, while also allowing an engagement with Lamarckian and Darwinian conceptions of evolution and development. The latter were to become increasingly predominant across the psychological and biological sciences (see Venn, 1984) and were to become central to the ways in which psychological ideas and concepts influenced how habits were conceptualized and targeted, particularly within educational practices.

Perhaps one of the best examples of the aligning of habit with discipline, training, exercise and education within the psychological sciences, and its incorporation within specific liberal strategies of

governmentality, is the place of habit within discussions of adolescence. This is to be found in the work of the eugenicist and psychologist, Stanley Hall. Hall's book, *Adolescence: Its Psychology, and its Relationships to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education* (1904), is associated with the invention of adolescence as a distinct stage of development. The book is very much a eugenics handbook, which makes links between the development of rhythm in adolescence and evolutionary arguments about primitivism and its link to different stages of evolutionary development. Hall was part of a colonial and imperialist project which saw psychology as being one of the key knowledge practices for identifying and mapping degeneracy. His book offered ways of correcting and rehabilitating various problems of social existence that were seen to ensue from this, including vice, criminality and delinquency. It is in the following quotes that we can clearly see the links being made between the colonial subject, the adolescent and rhythm:

Most savages in most respects are children, or, because of sexual maturity, more properly, adolescents of adult size. (1904: 649) the child and the race are each keys to the other. (1904: viii) Adolescence is the golden period of nascency for rhythm. (1904: 212)

Hall's project was to diagnose and 'arrest' what was framed as 'retardation' in both the individual and the race, which was aligned to vice, delinquency, criminality, prostitution and psychopathology. What was important in this project was the disciplining of rhythms: this was to be done through the inculcation of *habit* in the form of particular drills, instruction and forms of training. This included, for boys, industrial training, manual training, gymnastics, military training, cold baths and swimming, marching, rowing, football, baseball, tug-of-war, tennis and youth groups such as the Scouts (see particularly the founding of the Salford Lads Club in the early 1900s in the UK, which targeted young working-class boys and incorporated these principles in its vision). Girls were seen to have a different constitution that afforded rather different forms of training and discipline to suit their *nature*. These included: sewing, knitting, crocheting, weaving, ballet, outdoor walks and games, regular sleep, religion, Girl Guides groups and particular forms of education seen to be more suited to their physical and psychic constitution.

These arguments were made in the context of what many scholars have referred to as an emergent ‘machinic’ rhythm of life. This was characterized by the sound and flow of mechanical rhythms which represented an accelerated and speeded up tempo of life, which could also be repetitive and/or noisy (i.e. factory machines, transport machines, etc.). This was aligned to industrialization and Fordist modes of mass production driven by what Dinerstein (2003: 9) refers to as a ‘quest for continuous, efficient, flowing, forward motion’. This machine aesthetic was characterized by modalities of kinaesthetic expression and movement that were governed by ‘power, speed, repetition, precision, efficiency [and] rhythmic flow’ (2003: 12). Robert Levine (1997) refers to this *felt* experience, especially of city life as having a particular tempo. The so-called ‘New York minute’ in the 1930s has also been characterized by some as a ‘machine aesthetic’, found in some forms of music, particularly jazz and swing, and the stylizing of mechanical repetition particularly aligned to African-American jazz (see Dinerstein, 2003). Big-band swing music by African-American musicians such as Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, which was America’s most popular music in the 1930s, and the Lindy Hop, a particular form of swing dance, were both seen as getting-with the rhythm of machines.

An interesting term that was part of this machine aesthetic was the term ‘grooving’ – which referred to the bonding performed and enacted through these cultural forms and traditions, which amplified, modulated and augmented particular rhythmic affects to bind people together. As Dinerstein (2003: 16) says, ‘it is not enough to hear the groove; you must be drawn inside it, and it must penetrate to your inner core’. The focus on *grooving*, in this case given a positive value, takes a rather different form when we turn to other traditions, practices, objects, people and entities which were connected up through rhythmic forms of communication. This includes those that we find within more fascist ideologies such as National Socialist ideology.

This has been the subject of the much-marginalized discipline of mass psychology, particularly aligned to the work of Serge Moscovici (1985; also see Blackman, 2012, for more detail). Appeals to reason and rationality, didactic command and instruction, and staged forms of persuasion would miss the mark, and even make followers more resistant to change and transformation. What were needed were

appeals to the heart, to feeling, to passion, to the imagination; to a realm of affect which was co-present with the psychic and emotional rather than the intellect and reasoning. Moscovici (1985: 139) characterizes these appeals as creating an 'illusion of love' through the use of a range of techniques – affective, bodily and psychological – designed to maximize and facilitate processes of suggestion and imitation. These might include the use of symbols, flags, images, singing, music, affirmations, phrases, speeches and slogans. These would be delivered through the hypnotizing use of repetition, rather than didactic command and instruction. Individuals would be touched in ways which might be non-conscious or create the feeling that they are the originator of the feeling, rather than simply mechanically reproducing the beliefs of a charismatic other. These techniques propagated and orchestrated rhythm in particular ways, which were seen as crucial to the government and regulation of populations.

Work on the rhythmic dimensions of affective communication in this way has focused on the *felt* dimension of such practices – which might include military drill, synchronized forms of dance, practices such as Tai Chi, swimming, etc. – and the way that they literally feel good (see Blackman, 2008b; McNeil, 1995). So we can see from the way rhythm was articulated and enacted within early psychology, particularly in the work of Hall, that rhythm was associated with a lack of self-control understood within a primitivist discourse. Rhythms were to be disciplined through particular forms of training and habit. We can start to see the way rhythms are considered entangled processes that disclose the creativity of habit, as well as the aligning of habit to training, exercise, discipline and regulation.

McDougall's work is interesting because, although Lamarckian concepts of evolution were integral to his account, habits could not simply be located within the psycho-physical constitution of the individual, class or race. Instincts and habits are always 'organised in systems of increasing complexity' (1911: 17), but are often performed without deliberate action. The invocation of forms of action which might be enacted without conscious reflection and driven by a motivational force brought together Lamarckian theories of evolution with psychic research and neo-vitalism. Habits were patterns and regularities of behaviour, motor skills, reflex actions and responses that were engrained within a kind of bodily memory. However, although these forms of bodily memory lay outside of the subject's

conscious reflections and deliberations, the accomplishment or performance of the involuntary was a complex psycho-physical process which involved the cognitive, the affective and the conative; the co-constitution of knowing, feeling and intention.

‘Conation’ is a term which is taken to refer to the *motivational* aspects of behaviour; that which is seen to propel us towards certain kinds of action. Conation within psychology has largely been forgotten within studies of habit (see Blackman, 2012). What has been emphasized is what has come to be seen as the non-intentional aspects of habit and the separation of both affect and habit from cognition and conation (see Leys, 2011). When we look at the history of conation within the psychological sciences the complexity of how to think habit becomes apparent (see Huitt, 1999).

McDougall used the concept of conation to refer to the *intentional* aspects of behaviour, including possible psychic motivations, seeing the cognitive, affective and conative as co-constitutive processes. However, increasingly, and throughout McDougall’s body of work, what became emphasized was the importance of conscious deliberation. Intentional aspects of habit were recast as conscious, rational, cognitive processes, allowing for a separation between habit and cognition and affect and cognition that we find in recent work on affect, and which became increasingly central to psychological knowledge and practices. The transformation of habit has to be understood by recourse to the increasing dominance of the will within the psychological sciences (see Smith, 1992), which was to fundamentally re-arrange the heterogeneity of the elements, psychic research, neo-vitalism, eugenics and Lamarckian evolution which underpinned McDougall’s theorizing (see Asprem, 2010).

The Group Mind

The circuits of legitimation, authorization and contestation between McDougall and some of his close interlocutors, including William James,⁷ Henri Bergson and Pierre Janet, reveal the close relationship of habit to neo-vitalism and psychic research, and the important relational and affective dimensions of this concept that have largely become obscured or produced as oppositional theories within contemporary accounts. In McDougall’s application of his treatise to the problem of the ‘group mind’ (1927a) we can see more clearly his lament at

being characterized as being on the side of nature or materialism (the supposed instinctual basis of human life), and also ground more visibly the common experiences that were forming the basis and stimulating the work of his key interlocutors, Tarde, Janet and Bergson.

It is worth setting the context for this work as it was written after the First World War and also following McDougall's five-year military service considering 'the practical problems of psychotherapy' (1927a: viii). McDougall sets the application of his particular principles of social psychology in contrast to the 'strictly individual psychology of the laboratories' (1927a: xv). This was clearly a nod towards the work of Wundt and the kind of abstracted psychology which treated human subjects as monads, 'as self-contained and complete in themselves' rather than as 'merely nodes or meeting points of all the forces of the world acting and reacting in unlimited time and space' (1927a: xv). This more relational ontology was framed in relation to one of the key problematics that structured the book. This saw affective transfer or telepathic transfer as being a normal condition of human and even animal communication. McDougall linked this to what he saw as the overwhelming evidence from studies of crowd psychology, psychic research and subliminal psychology, that thoughts, beliefs, affects, desires and emotions could be transmitted between individual minds other than through what were recognized as the normal channels of sense-perception and bodily movement (see 1927a: 9). The theme of the book concerned the question of how knowledge of these processes could be useful for liberal forms of governmentality.

McDougall proposed two explanations to understand collective consciousness and the constitution of collective mental life that should be given serious consideration: telepathy and suggestibility. McDougall reserved judgement on telepathy, but, like many of his contemporaries, he felt that the evidence pointed towards forms of 'action at a distance' that in the future would be further evidenced and understood (also see Blackman, 2010). Suggestibility was reserved for what were described as 'simple' or unorganized crowds, rather than the complex forms of organization that were characterized by military life and the army for example. The crowd or mob became the prototypical example of retrogression and primitivism, where suggestibility became a concept for explaining such reversion, which was aligned to irrationality and animality. Consider

McDougall's description of the crowd, written in the context of understanding the riots in the Paris Communes in the 1890s:

it is excessively emotional, impulsive, violent, fickle, inconsistent, irresolute and extreme in action, displaying only the coarser emotions and the less refined sentiments, extremely suggestible, careless in deliberation, hasty in judgement, incapable of any but the simpler and imperfect forms of reasoning. (1927a: 45)

Suggestibility was mapped onto an emerging instinctual economy that aligned the instincts with behaviour, thought and feeling considered automatic and involuntary (Foucault, 2003). This voluntary/involuntary axis was mapped onto a distinction between the primitive and civilized that was central to evolutionary theories of degeneracy prominent at the turn of the 20th century (Darwin, 1859). The apparent psychopathology of crowd behaviour mobilized by McDougall and others, such as Le Bon, aligned the crowd with 'an array of pathologized "others" – neurotic, feminine, "primitive", and racialized others, the mass of working classes and the poor' (Orr, 2006: 42). As McDougall argued, 'its behaviour is like that of an unruly child or an untutored passionate savage in a strange situation, and in the worse cases it is like that of a wild beast' (1927a: 45).

With suggestibility re-articulated within an 'architecture of the primitive' (Bennett, 2010), McDougall revisited his 'theory of the instincts' to provide his own account of transmission. This was not simply a theory of biological drives but rather an account of how instincts could be organized within increasing systems of complexity such that they would take on acquired characteristics or habits. The motivational energy would come from the instinctual impulse that could become intensified such that, although it might be experienced as involuntary or automatic, it is nevertheless modulated through what McDougall termed 'sympathetic induction' (1927a: 27). The concept of *sympathetic induction* allowed McDougall to retain his focus on the distributional economies characteristic of his intimate instinct/habit pairing, but also to introduce a mimetic conception of transmission found in both telepathy and suggestion. This allowed him to account for inter-psychological processes or what he termed collective mental life. This was a way of accounting for the kinds of telepathic rapport which he believed, following the work of Bingham Newland (1916), in his book, *What is Instinct? Some Thoughts on Telepathy and Subconsciousness in*

Animals, could also be found between animals of the same species (see Blackman, 2012, for a discussion of Bingham Newland's writings).

The kinds of foresight and sensing that might be found among insects, moths, flies, birds and fish (all the subjects of Newland's book) were evidence of the basis of instinctual behaviour within telepathic processes such as teleaesthesia.⁸ In other words, instincts were not simply hard-wired biological drives, to be understood by physiology, but represented complex systems of communication or affective transfer, which were shared, transmitted and co-constituted between members of species. McDougall extended this understanding to his concept of character, retaining Tarde's focus on imitation but also allowing a concept of 'innate constitution' to become integrated into his account of the development of national as opposed to collective life (1927a: 110). This allowed him to make differentiations between nations based on eugenic hierarchizations in order to make pronouncements about the so-called civilizing ethos of countries such as England, which, in his eyes, had not fully considered the conceptual basis of their over-zealous imperial practices.⁹ McDougall argued that customs, beliefs, institutions and language evolve through the mechanisms and mediation of imitation, but that 'such general imitation will only take place when the cultural element in question is more or less congenial to the innate qualities of the bulk of individuals' (1927a: 110).

The Future of Habit

Given the heterogeneous elements that make up McDougall's theorizing of habit and instinct, and the close concatenation of neo-vitalism, psychic research and eugenics in this work, how did psychological theories of habit become aligned with mechanism to later be dismissed as having nothing to offer sociological and philosophical theories of habit? What paved the way for mechanistic and materialist conceptions of human and non-human conduct and behaviour to be taken up within liberal strategies of governmentality? In order to understand the histories of the concept of habit, we need to look outside McDougall's work and consider the increasing specialization of psychological knowledge and its uptake within emerging strategies of governance and regulation. As we have already seen, when we follow habit's fate within education, evolutionary concepts – which psychology had

already helped to shape and augment – had taken up a central place within eugenics strategies. Although interest in telepathy and neo-vitalism was integral to psychology, particularly increasing after the First World War with the massive scale of loss and bereavement that people were suffering, in 1930 membership of the Society for Psychological Research halved (see Valentine, 2012b). Psychology was in a state of transition and was increasingly to exclude telepathy and psychic research from its legitimate subject matter. Telepathy had increasingly become associated with the occult and spiritualism, and the professionalization of psychology, central to its boundary-making, was focused upon its increasing role in offering practical advice and guidance, building upon the ‘interplay between the professional and popular’ (Valentine, 2012b: 84). We can clearly see this in the transformation of McDougall’s writing and the increasing role he played in popular broadcasting and ‘courting public appeal’ (Valentine, 2012b: 84).

In a book first published in 1927, *Character and the Conduct of Life* (1927b), the traces of neo-vitalism and psychic research within McDougall’s concept of habit and instinct seem to have been lost. Discussions of telepathy, the survival of the personality after death, hypnosis and allied phenomena have gone. What we are left with is a book set up in the Sophist tradition of offering practical advice and guidance on the art of living. This book is part of the beginning of what sociologists such as Nikolas Rose (1985, 1989, 1996) have identified as the emergence and taking-form of liberal forms of personhood within the psychological sciences. McDougall’s concept of ‘human nature’ focuses specifically on what is taken to be inborn about personhood, and how this can be cultivated and intensified through exercise, training, discipline and practice. The vestiges of neo-vitalism and psychic research can be identified in two ways: the aligning of impulses or instinctual energies with some kind of vital energy; what McDougall terms a ‘common stock of vital energy, an energy which, call it what we will, “elan vital”, or libido, or will-to-live’ (1927b: 25) forms the motivational impulse towards action. What also remains is a concept of ‘emotional contagion’, the idea that the development of character, for example, is sensitive to the kinds of atmosphere or affective dynamics created by parental relations that a child will attune to for better or worse. The translation of transmission into contagion is contained within McDougall’s discussion of the relationship between character and happiness. This is

an inter-psychology that focuses on what might be passed between people through the registers of affect, emotion and feeling, but which obscures the more telepathic concept of transfer contained within his earlier work:

It is generally agreed that it is reasonable and right to desire to be happy; that we ought to be happy if we can, not only because happiness is a desirable state of mind in itself, but also because it diffuses itself, tending by simple contagion to make happier those with whom we come into contact. (1927b: 105)

McDougall's attention in this book shifts – and this is significant for my argument – to new key interlocutors. What demands McDougall's energy is no longer subliminal psychology, which as we have seen gradually became marginalized within psychology (see Luckhurst, 2002), the Society for Psychical Research or discussions of hypnosis. Rather, the writings of Freud characterized as the 'New Psychology' (McDougall, 1927b: 39), the writings of William James and Darwinism provide the dialogic conditions for his articulations of character and conduct. I do not have the space to engage with the way in which Freud translated telepathy and suggestion within his formulations of transference (see Campbell, 2009; Chertok and Stengers, 1992), but what we can clearly see in this later account is a modification of his concepts of habit and instinct which take into account the increasing naturalization of the concept of will or inhibition (see Smith, 1992). This sits alongside his commitment to process ontologies (James and Bergson) rather than reifying the human mind as a thing or entity (McDougall, 1927b: 39).

What remains is a paradox, where habits are both the site of change and movement, as well as incorporating the potential for bodily forms of fixity, continuity and stability. What does change, however, is the impulsive potency or power accorded to habit. In earlier accounts instincts and habits share an impulse to action, which is further extended through the modification of instincts as habits. However, in this later account, habits lose their motivational energy, which arguably corresponds to their new aligning with and modification by will power. As McDougall states: 'The habits are only instruments, which subserve our purposes, but do not determine them' (1927b: 181). For McDougall, human behaviour and conduct is

intentional, anticipatory and purposive. Habit, instinct, memory and related concepts were to take up a reconfigured set of relationships within this newly emerging, liberal and increasingly neoliberal arts of living.

Conclusion

Ruth Leys (2011) has recently argued for the importance of genealogy to understand the way in which habit and affect have come to be aligned with non-intentionality, particularly within contemporary affect theory. The psychological and neurosciences have become privileged knowledge practices for further specifying the nature and limits of non-intentionality (see Callard and Papoulias, 2010). This is often described as a *materialist* process approach to embodiment, which relies on particular psychological and neuro-psychological concepts in order to understand affective transmission (see Blackman, 2012). Habit, as a form of bodily memory, is one such concept, aligned specifically to the action of the nervous system in accounts of affect contagion. I hope that this partial genealogy of habit as it took form within social psychology complicates the easy alignment of habit and affect with non-intentionality, and reveals the complex place of psychological forms of knowledge and experimentation in theorizing the body's potential for mediation. The hesitations, contradictions and dilemmas governing the psychological sciences lie in the background of the paradoxes which govern contemporary understandings of habit.

I hope that the partial genealogical reflections presented in this article broaden our understanding of the paradoxes of habit, where if habit retains its lineage with mimesis, this allows us to better understand its unique position in affect modulation, which encompasses regulation (in the form of discipline) and also extends its potential for engaging the new, change and creativity (Grosz, 2004). This perhaps exposes the paradox of habit, where we are both open to influence but not continually confronting the world anew. However, any ontological reflections made in this way must also recognize the place of habit within a habit–instinct–memory–suggestion axis that played a primary role in what Bennett (2010) terms an 'architecture of the primitive'. It was this architecture of personhood that was increasingly to take form within already emerging liberal governmental traditions, in which psychology was to play a key role.

Notes

1. Mimetic forms of communication have been characterized in the recent work of Anna Gibbs (2010: 186) as 'corporeally based forms of communication, both voluntary and involuntary'. She links mimesis to contemporary work on affect and draws primarily from infant research. Ruth Leys (1983) focuses specifically on practices such as hypnotic suggestion in the context of work on trauma to explore mimesis. My own recent work extends this focus on mimesis to explore the connections between telepathy, suggestion, voice hearing and related phenomena in what I term a 'subliminal archive' at the turn of the last century (see Blackman, 2012).
2. Sedgwick and Frank (1995: 24) describe Tomkins as 'a disciplinarily excessive figure in Psychology'.
3. Gabriel Tarde and Le Bon crossed disciplinary demarcations between psychology and sociology, which were still very much in their infancy. Apfelbaum and McGuire (1986: 33) show how the lack of specialization which characterized the work of both authors enabled them to produce treatises on subjects as diverse as 'tobacco, Arabian civilization, photography, socialism, education, and military psychology . . . geography, archaeology, futurology and poetry'. Similarly Moscovici (1985) and Barrows (1981) both argue that the so-called laws of human behaviour which both Tarde and Le Bon were attempting to map, was very much an interdisciplinary venture, with both authors writing on a range of eclectic subjects which could not be subsumed by either social psychology or sociology.
4. See the dialogue and exchange in the journal *Critical Inquiry* between Ruth Leys, an American historian of science, and affect theorists, specifically William Connolly, Elizabeth Wilson and Adam Frank, which originate from and respond to Ruth Leys' (2011) critique of Affect Theory published in the journal.
5. Subliminal psychology was characterized particularly by the writings of Boris Sidis (1898), Frederic Myers (1904), William James (1890) and Pierre Janet (1907), who all subscribed to the idea that consciousness was not housed within the individual mind or brain, but rather that individual minds were receptors or transmitters of more collective forms of consciousness, which existed and

extended beyond the human body. Subliminal psychology spanned an interest in dynamic psychology and psychopathology (particularly multiple personality and hysteria), telepathy and psychical research, hypnotic trance, suggestion and crowd psychology (see Blackman, 2010, for a discussion of subliminal psychology in relation to current debates on affect and vitalism across the humanities).

6. Parapsychology is now more commonly known within the psychological sciences as the psychology of anomalous experience and aligns a diverse range of phenomena and experiences; including mediumship, electronic voice phenomena, magical beliefs, lucid dreaming, death-bed visions, miracle cures, paranormal beliefs, false memory, telepathy, near-death states, haunted experiences, hypnosis, the placebo effect and so forth. It is framed as a study of extraordinary or exceptional phenomena, but is not restricted to those which might be delineated as paranormal. These phenomena are often framed and constituted through the neuro and cognitive psychology of perception and belief.
7. McDougall dedicated his 1923 book, *An Outline of Psychology*, to William James, with the following inscription: to 'The Honoured Memory of William James, Great Philosopher, Great Psychologist, and Great Man'. James was a continual inspiration for McDougall, who saw his own 'purposive psychology' (as outlined in this book) as having a very close relationship to James's pragmatic philosophy.
8. Teleaesthesia was defined as 'perception at a distance or power of vision transcending time and space' (Newland, 1916: 189).
9. It was the ignoring of the importance of race and the overestimation of the moulding influence of culture and institutions, eloquently voiced by Lord Macaulay, that led England some eighty years ago to set out on the task of endowing the millions of India with British culture and institutions. (McDougall, 1927a: 101)

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Lisa Blackman is a Reader in the Department of Media and Communications at Goldsmiths, University of London. She works at the intersection of body studies and media and cultural studies. She is editor of *Body & Society* and a co-editor of *Subjectivity*. She has published four books; her most recent is *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation* (Sage/TCS, 2012). Her previous books include: *Mass Hysteria: Critical Psychology and Media Studies* (Palgrave, 2001, with Valerie Walkerdine); *Hearing Voices: Embodiment and Experience* (Free Association Books, 2001); *The Body: The Key Concepts* (Berg, 2008). She is particularly interested in phenomena which have puzzled scientists, artists, literary writers and the popular imagination for centuries, including automatic writing, voice hearing, suggestion, telepathy and automatism.