

Research Article

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Pathologies of Passion

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Abstract: In this paper, I aim to clarify and expand Alphonso Lingis' understanding of impassioned states by showing how society pathologises passion through the language of emotions, thereby obscuring the excesses that are constitutive of life. I proceed by first analysing how modernity reconfigures disruptive passions into manageable emotional states that sustain regularity, utility, and calculative models of the self. Second, I elaborate six interrelated properties of passion while systematically contrasting the latter with culturally coded emotions. Finally, I briefly examine how literature, theatre, cinema, and media narratives disclose the contingent, irrational forces that shape individual lives. I conclude that pathologising passion is not a neutral diagnostic gesture but a deeply philosophical operation that props up a shallow, needs-based conception of agency, and I argue instead for a philosophical practice that attends to impassioned ruptures and shared festive intensities as indispensable revelations of the real forces that contour both individual and collective existence.

Keywords: Alphonso Lingis; passion; emotion; excess; pathology

In many of his works,¹ Alphonso Lingis marks a fundamental distinction between the socio-political sphere and that of impassioned states. The former is said to be driven by functional, economic, and social needs, and serves to produce people whose actions are coordinated with prevailing social structures. Contrastingly, passion names an excessive force that is generated within the organism and ruptures through dictates of the social veil. In *The First Person Singular*, Lingis speaks of passion as follows:²

Impassioned states, seen as disruptions of the integrated and socialized individual and of the effective operation of mercantile society, have been marginalized and pathologized in the philosophy of mind. But they remain central in literature and drama viewed in theater, cinema, or television, as well as in the depictions of social and political conflicts, economic enterprises, and market trends diffused in the media, where we also find understanding of our lives.

As can be noted, this citation contains three fundamental and interrelated observations that shall serve as the impetus for the analysis that follows. First, impassioned states have been recognised to be disruptive of the coherence and order expected of the integrated social self. Second, the history of philosophy – even if, as I shall show, not exclusively – has marginalised and pathologized passions. Third, passions find their central place in various cultural forms, which in turn provide us with a more fundamental picture of our lives, as well as life more generally.

In this paper, I aim at two fundamental goals. First, I perform an exegetical and expansive analysis of Lingis' ideas on the nature of passion, its pathologization, and the revelations it provides. Second, I build on my previous analyses of Lingis' views on passion in two important ways. In my previous work, I have described Lingis' account of passions as based on five fundamental features.³ In this paper, I locate a sixth property of impassioned states,

¹ It is true that, for the most part, Lingis speaks of emotions and passions as contrasting. There are however exceptions. In works such as his 2010 paper "Strange Emotions in Contemporary Theory," for example, he uses the label "(strange) emotions" as an analogue of passions. I attribute this difference in terminology to the ongoing development of Lingis' views on the topic at the time.

² Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 11.

³ See, for instance, Young, "Passion and Allure".

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namely that of universality. I take this feature to be crucial both for a proper understanding of his work as well as for the task of this paper, and I shall therefore address its consequences at some length below. Furthermore, I also supplement my previous readings dealing exclusively with passion by framing the latter in relation to the language of emotions. I order to accomplish these tasks, I will proceed as follows: In the first section, I analyse the manner in which modernity has pathologized impassioned states by transforming them into emotions so as to preserve the regularity and productivity of social life. In following, I then analyse the notion of passion in terms of its six fundamental properties, while also contrasting the impassioned state with emotional affectivity. Finally, I analyse the manner in which cultural artefacts provide the fundamental resources for understanding one's life and the forces that shape it beyond the constraints of mundane social life.

1 Economies of Pathologization

Most of the time, each and every one lives out their lives as anyone would. They adopt various habits and gestures acquired through diverse social interactions that are in turn also taken on by others. Society organises life into predetermined goal-oriented movements directed at the mundane activities and tasks delivered upon each and every one by the dictates of everyday life.⁴ More precisely, what is routinely called the self in popular discourse is in many ways a mere *social* and “domesticated” self which one develops by following routines and acting out a specific social role; one is a doctor, a lawyer, a professor, a mother, a husband, a factory worker, and they live out their lives shifting between different personas. In Lingis’ words, one routinely does “what there is to be done,”⁵ through mechanical movements removed from the “initiatives by which an agent posits and extends its identity.”⁶

Lingis claims that social life also blunts the essential force of language by understanding it as serving the sole purpose of communication.⁷ In acting out one’s social roles, one speaks as yet another representative of a common rational discourse. For instance, a lawyer might speak in the legalistic language necessitated by their profession, whereas their client expects them to speak as *any* lawyer would.⁸ Lingis is worth quoting at some length on this point when he claims that⁹

he or she speaks as a representative, equivalent to and interchangeable with others, of the established truth. She speaks as a veterinarian, an electrician, a computer programmer, a public health nurse. He formulates his anxiety attacks in terms of contemporary psychiatry; she names her aches and pains with the terminology of scientific medicine. An individual’s very body sees and feels as an ophthalmologist, a ferryboat captain, a lab technician, a British or Hong Kong subject.

By entering into what Lingis calls the “rational community,” the language one uses and thinks through is coded, mediated, and refined via a form of rational discourse that is shared, impersonal, and hence “one and common” to all members of a community.¹⁰ The person speaking effectively speaks a language that makes them interchangeable with any other person, insofar as they must necessarily conform to the dictates of the society they belong to and the role they play out.¹¹

This rational discourse is then geared toward the “collective enterprises” that draw individuals into a shared social order that is economic in the broad sense of being intrinsically symmetric and based on utility. Modern society, for Lingis, involves the subjugation of oneself to the industrial organisation of labour and a common

⁴ Lingis, *Irrevocable: A Philosophy of Mortality*, 65–66.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁶ Lingis, “Animal Body, Inhuman Face,” 114.

⁷ Lingis, “Contact and Communication”, pp. 120–121. It is worth noting that Lingis does not view language exclusively in this manner. While it is true that language is able to code bodies in oppressive manners (see, for instance, “The Subjectification of the Body” in *Foreign Bodies*), it is also true that Lingis sees identity as established through “oracular words” that take the form “I am...” As a result, language also serves as powerful tool for self-affirmation (see Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 50).

⁸ Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*, 110–111.

⁹ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 90.

¹⁰ Lingis, *The Community of Those who Have Nothing in Common*, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 110–112.

market that systematises production and distribution through exchange value. It also requires that one contributes to, and participates in, various political and legal structures. In short, society is essentially built around regularity, homeostasis, and the effective operations that are, at once, responsible for binding people together politico-economically, modifying their bodies accordingly,¹² and rendering them anonymous and interchangeable. In this way, one's body as well as their so-called "individuality" ultimately comes to be shaped by the dictates of collaborative work effort and collective life.¹³ Lingis claims that this common discourse of society and the exigencies of work also serve to bring into force and delimit the very experience of the passage of time. What is called the future comes to be understood through a range of possibilities, while the past is preserved via the accumulation and sedimentation of practical knowledge and skills. Work allows us to "perceive processes and transitions in our environment" in order to then measure apposite "effects and results." This measurement in turn serves to render work quantifiable in terms of "half-day's job, a day's work."¹⁴

What Lingis describes as "modern mercantile society" effectively seeks "to maintain continuity and regularity in our perceived and practicable environment and to measure our drives and forces to the scale and proportion of practical tasks at hand."¹⁵ Since society is sustained by symmetry and homeostasis, it must necessarily curb the persistent looming threat of moments when stability gives way to vertiginous excess and rupture, or what Lingis calls passion. I shall have occasion to return to the specific use of passion below. For the time being, it is important to note that, for Lingis, the birth of the modern understanding of the ego as theorised in philosophy, psychology, and other disciplines is effectively made to be consistent with the purposes of modern mercantile society.¹⁶ As I shall show below, Lingis sees bodies as "sensory-motor systems that generate the excess of force which makes them able to move themselves." Simultaneously however, "bodies are also substances that can be moved and that can be coded" and therefore "made use of."¹⁷ This, in turn, is partly accomplished through a process in which the reality of impassioned states comes to be coded in terms of the language of emotions.

As I have just noted, passions are by their very definition excessive and hence disruptive of the scope and ends of mercantile society. As a result, the restraint of passion by means of the relatively recent all-encompassing¹⁸ vocabulary of the "emotions" allow for intense impassioned states to be reconceived in terms of milder "intermittent attributes or drives."¹⁹ Lingis distinguishes between passions and emotions as follows. In essence, and as I shall elaborate below, passions are active and excessive forces generated by bodies. Conversely, the language of emotions first began to be developed in the eighteenth century, and has acquired the "stamp of objectivity" through its incorporation in disciplines such as psychology, evolutionary biology, neurobiology, and other politico-scientific discourses. In contrast to the passions, emotions are seen as nothing more than a passively undergone "psychic effect of bodily disturbances caused by outside things or events."²⁰ In this way, they come to be "conceived as transitory events occurring to" an ego which is nonetheless distinct from them. Furthermore, by reframing passions as manageable emotions, the modern ego comes to be understood to have the capacity to step back from the excesses of passion in order to "consider them, distance itself from them, humor them, and maintain an ironic stance with regard to them."²¹ This in turn allows for their proper management, control, and integration with its practical intentions and projects.²² In short, the relatively manageable language of the

¹² See Lingis, *Foreign Bodies*, Chapter 2; Lingis, "Ecological Consciousness," 298–299.

¹³ Lingis, *The Community of Those who Have Nothing in Common*, 5.

¹⁴ Lingis, "Catastrophic Times," 176.

¹⁵ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 11.

¹⁶ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 11.

¹⁷ Lingis, *Foreign Bodies*, 53.

¹⁸ As Thomas Dixon notes in "Emotion: The History of a Keyword in Crisis," in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the previously differentiated vocabulary of the passions, affections, appetites, and sentiments was absorbed into an all-embracing term "emotion." The result of this shift was a secular psychology that displaced older, more nuanced, discussions of the human.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁰ Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 65.

²¹ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 10.

²² See Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 10–11; Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 65.

emotions allows for impassioned states to be assimilated and pathologized, but only at the cost of inevitably leading a muted and insignificant life. As Lingis puts it in *Irrevocable*, a²³

psychology that would enjoin us to take a distance from passions, view them objectively, from the outside, as others view them, that pathologizes the passions, is in fact assigning priority to everyday life in the political economy set up to maximize order and productivity, making it normative. But then we have to recognize that this life can be emptied by the erosion of meaning.

As this quote makes clear, the ends of the pathologization of passion is seen to be congruent with that of maximising the bureaucratic order and productivity in the modern political economy. In fact, Lingis aptly points out that since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, mercantile society pushed for the endorsement of avarice and self-interest, since these align with long-term political goals, thereby blocking the “disruptive short term passions of anger, grief, falling in love, as well as shame, regret, and mourning.”²⁴ In summary, and to put the point differently, the end of mercantile society is to maximise efficiency, and its means are the pathologization of passion by means of the language of emotions.

Lingis further points out that the self-consciousness that is understood and filtered through the language of emotions is essentially conceived as a rational and calculative ego, concerned with long-term interests. This decidedly “modern ego” in turn necessarily defines itself in terms of needs and wants.²⁵ Lingis argues that such an account of the social self faces two important shortcomings. First, the social understanding of the self that is formulated in terms of needs opens oneself up to control by the forces that promise to satisfy said needs. People acquire a servile identity that perfectly supports the continuity and productivity goals of the modern market by making the individual dependent and controllable. Furthermore, since we also communicate these needs and wants to others, the latter come to understand them as appeals, thereby reading them as further “declarations of subservience, invitations to subjugation.”²⁶ Second, Lingis views the discourse of needs as perpetuating a common but fundamental misrepresentation of life.²⁷ To be sure, he is aware that the understanding of life as negativity is ubiquitously present in the discourse of disciplines such as biology, psychoanalysis, and even philosophy.²⁸ Nevertheless, he also claims that such states do not represent the “essence of life” since the “ego that arises as an awareness of needs and wants, the self that forms as the cramp knotted over this negativity, is intermittent and shallow.”²⁹ This claim is important, and therefore requires further clarification. Lingis cuts against the grain of orthodox discourse on the relation between life and needs in two important ways. First, and as I will explore in more detail later on, he levels out the distinction between humans and non-humans when he conceives all living beings in general to be defined in their very being by excess and expenditure. Second, and relatedly, he reverses the relation between needs and action. Classically, an organism’s actions have been understood to be moved by its needs, lacks, and wants. Conversely, Lingis claims that needs arise precisely because a living body is constituted in such a way that it must necessarily squander its surplus energies. Should these excesses not be expended by the organism, it will eventually destroy itself.³⁰ Throughout nature, surplus energies are largely expended through non-utilitarian movements that are defined as “spreadings of duration” without a determinate “end-point, a goal or result.”³¹ This in turn seems to imply that explicit goal-oriented movements are relatively isolated instances of life set by the rhythms of social life.³² As I have shown above,

²³ Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 69.

²⁴ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 11. See also Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 69.

²⁵ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 94.

²⁶ Lingis, *First Person Singular* 94. See also Lingis, *Foreign Bodies*, 79.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Lingis, “Nietzsche and Animals,” 7; Lingis, *The Imperative*, 16–17.

²⁹ Lingis, *The Imperative*, 16. See also Young, “Passion and Allure”; Young, “Against Thanatocentrism”.

³⁰ Lingis, “Nietzsche and Animals,” 8.

³¹ Lingis, “Animal Body, Inhuman Face,” 115.

³² Ibid., 114.

social life sets up structures of continuity and stability, channelling life's positive forces into defined roles and needs, thereby dampening and muting their force through suppression and institutional pathologization.³³

2 Passions and Emotions

As I have already suggested in the introduction above, Lingis' work often alludes the distinction between our social civilised identity, and the realm of passions. Having just outlined the mechanisms of the former state, I now turn to Lingis' discussion of passion. As I have just shown, social life tames the unruly excessive forces that surge from living bodies by "[enjoining] us each to be individuals, enduring integral subjects of attribution and responsibility" for "politico-economic motives."³⁴ Lingis nevertheless maintains that these ordinary rhythms are intermittently "interrupted by *experiences*."³⁵ Whereas philosophy often takes experience to be coextensive with consciousness, its everyday use suggests something out of the ordinary, as when one claims to have had an unusual or surprising experience. Lingis retains its latter sense, using experience here to refer specifically punctuated moments "marked by astonishment, outbursts of joy, fear, anger, and love."³⁶ This retention of the everyday use is important, in that it shows that the true form of experience is not a commonplace one marked by self-conscious reflection, but by passionate encounters. I have addressed the Lingisian notion of passion in my earlier work, where I have isolated five distinct features of impassioned states.³⁷ However, my present analysis supplements and develops that account in two novel and distinct ways. First, I here draw a sharp contrast between the main characteristics of passions and the vocabulary of the emotions. This will further serve to explain the perceived danger attached to impassioned states. Additionally, I introduce a further sixth feature of passions in order to expand on my earlier fivefold framework. Through the analysis of this additional property, I further clarify the significance of passion and the mechanisms of its pathologization. In order to foreground the analysis that follows, it is possible to summarily define Lingis' account of passions as (1) non-utilitarian, excessive states that (2) generate the self (3) through an investment in a particular object of passion whose effects (4) alter spatio-temporal flow and (5) endure beyond the passionate surge. Furthermore, passionate states are (6) universal features that manifest ubiquitously throughout the world of living beings. In what follows, I will consider each of these features, albeit not in the order just listed, and not necessarily in a separate manner.

The self is not the same as our social identity for Lingis. For ease of reference, I shall therefore here use the distinction between the "social self" and the "self" to refer to one's social identity and the sense of an internal unity respectively. Lingis maintains that our social identity shifts between contexts by taking on roles. As he puts it in *Abuses*, "one is not the same person in sacred and in profane places, in crowds and behind closed doors, in the day and in the night; one is not the same person before different interlocutors."³⁸ For Lingis, emotional states are touted to be "transitory events occurring to the [social] self, which subsists behind or beneath them."³⁹ This sentence highlights that the language of emotions serves to effectively ringfence the social self from its shifting emotional states. The latter are seen as something that merely *happen* to the former, but this also implies that the social self is something that allegedly endures independently of the emotional states one undergoes.

³³ It would be useful to note, albeit in passing, that Lingis' view of the manner in which language codes the body is influenced by Michel Foucault. In fact, Lingis makes this influence explicit in chapter 4 of *Foreign Bodies*. Nevertheless, he also brings two important modifications to Foucault's work. First, for Lingis dissent and nonconformity, as products of passion, are always directed at some object, event, or situation (see Young, "Against Thanatocentrism"). Second, contingency of medical and psychiatric categories that enable pathologization mask passion as a ubiquitous, transhistorical, phenomenon. Both these aspects shall be tackled in detail below.

³⁴ Lingis, *Abuses*, 125.

³⁵ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 9.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Young, "Passion and Allure".

³⁸ Lingis, *Abuses*, 125.

³⁹ Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 65. See also Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 10.

Conversely, Lingis claims that impassioned states actually *generate* the self through the experience of being isolated within oneself.⁴⁰ As he puts it in *Irrevocable*, “the self arises in the passion, takes form in it. In wonder or in rage the sense of self surges, the self surges, and it is an awestruck or enraged self. In impassioned states the self arises, a force that confronts, makes claims on others and on the world.”⁴¹ As this quote indicates, passions bring to the fore and heighten the inner experience of a “deep, primordial throbbing of life, insistent and indubitable,”⁴² thereby bringing the sense of being anchored to and isolated within one’s own body.⁴³ According to Lingis, this sense of self is thereby generated through the effacement of the perceived illusory distance between the self and the body. To cite Lingis again, he claims that in the grips of an impassioned states, I find that I am effectively anchored in “my trembling, recoiling, tightening body, my blushes, my sobbing; I am completely in my rage, my jealousy, my astonishment.”⁴⁴

It bears noting that Lingis seems to suggest that different impassioned states have distinctive means of generating this sense of self. For instance, states of anger and wrath produce the self by separating oneself from that which is found to be objectionable and unjust,⁴⁵ while courage produces the self by pitting it against the fatigue and pain to be endured.⁴⁶ It seems as though he also suggests that one can inwardly sense the kind of impassioned state by virtue of the way they are related to their different objects. What Lingis is presumably saying is that passions such as courage, fear, and hope are not different due to some core internal essence of the state, but by virtue of the fact that they have different objects – along with “distinctive tensions and tonalities” – as their target.⁴⁷ All this serves to illustrate that the impassioned self remains an inner state that is nevertheless simultaneously also always already necessarily directed at a specific object or event. In other words, each impassioned state is always a matter of “passionate attachment” to some being or another.⁴⁸ Lingis claims that when a relation is based on utility or symbolic value, one feels both separate and superior to their object. Nevertheless, since passions are intrinsically independent of calculative thought, they essentially obliterate the perceived fission that separates beings. For instance, if one is passionately attached to a human or non-human other, one comes to feel the movements of another’s body in oneself.⁴⁹ Differently stated, the impassioned self essentially simultaneously *fuses* with the object of passion while also retaining a relative *difference* from its object.

In view of the above, one may notice that passions and emotions entertain decidedly different relations to their object. As is clear, impassioned states operate through a kind of feedback loop in which the inner sense of self is actively generated through a merger with its object. This means that they are directly experienced in a decisive manner; one immediately and directly senses the erotic bond through which one essentially “becomes [their] lover.”⁵⁰ This active immediacy and candour stands in direct contrast with emotional states in the following two ways. First, as a mere “psychic effect of bodily disturbances,” emotions are essentially something that is passively endured.⁵¹ As I have shown earlier, emotions are also intrinsically *mediated* in that they are bound to systems of classification (or what Lingis calls “cultural artifacts”) that are integrated into rational, law-regulated life.⁵² As Lingis puts it, emotions “surge focused by words and symbols.”⁵³ Second, emotional relations share an *ambivalent* relation to their object. Using an example borrowed from Lingis’ own work, it might often

⁴⁰ Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 66, 69; Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 10.

⁴¹ Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 66.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁴⁴ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 10.

⁴⁵ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 15–16; Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 67.

⁴⁶ Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 68.

⁴⁷ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 9.

⁴⁸ Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 70.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 70–71.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁵² Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 54; Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 11.

⁵³ Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 54.

happen that children share an indecisive relation with their parents, insofar as they can concurrently love them but also resent them for being controlling.⁵⁴

As I have suggested earlier, emotions curb the excesses of life by channelling the latter into social and psychic systems designed to prioritise efficiency, utility, and production. Since human emotions are interwoven with calculations embedded in socio-economic systems and structures of rationality, the latter serve to rein in any overflow of impulse, recuperating it back into the social veil.⁵⁵ For instance, Lingis argues that the psychic system of “libidinous desire” is both generative of a number of social selves, and serves to subdue excessive impulses.⁵⁶ This suppression is in turn made possible through the “*coded forms* of our [emotions]” that maintain a “reserve of force”⁵⁷ directed at curbing our excessive dynamisms so as to sustain an “opportunistic and self-indulgent life made of acquiescences, compromises, and resignations.”⁵⁸ The imposition of structured emotions is also responsible for converting positive energies into a system that operates primarily on the basis of the negativity of need. Lingis however claims that the social self that surfaces through the awareness of need is an “intermittent and shallow” simulacrum of life, since needs and wants are “partial and superficial accidents that befall the plenitude of an organism which is alive for itself in its sensuality.”⁵⁹ In fact, he insists that every living being is, at bottom, positively constituted as a sort of “plenum” that constantly generates and discharges excess energies.⁶⁰ As he puts it in *The First Person Singular*, “a living organism is not an abyss [of needs and wants]; it is a *dynamo*.”⁶¹

Impassioned states always involve surges of surplus dynamic energies that are disproportionately invested in some object of passion. In other words, passionate energies “expend themselves without return,”⁶² and are therefore both non-utilitarian and asymmetrical. Since both life in general and passion unfold through excess and expenditure, the impassioned state of excess discloses two further facts. First, the surplus energies that course through impassioned states hint at a fundamental continuity between human and non-human forms of vitality. Second, excessive impassioned states seem to be intrinsic to the way life maintains and transforms itself. I shall have occasion to further elaborate on these two points later below.

Conversely, Lingis characterises emotions as intermittent or “transitory events” that surge and are brought to a halt by the calculating social self or ego. The role of the latter is to keep possible surges of excess under control, lest they disrupt the utilitarian rhythms of civilised life.⁶³ Passions are however different in that they neither stand in contrast to the ego, nor push against it. Rather passions erupt out of the body as “states of high energy” that “issue in agitations and actions” before they “reach a pitch, and endure for a time proper to each, fading off in exhaustion.” That is to say, passionate states are fleeting and non-utilitarian surges of expenditure that come to an end when “the energies and the tonality of the passion are discharged” through some “decisive act.”⁶⁴ This process is perfectly encapsulated in Lingis’ description of impassioned lust:⁶⁵

Lust does not know what it is. The mouth lets go of the chain of its sentences, rambles, giggles, the tongue spreads its wet out over the lips. The hands that caress move in random detours with no idea of what they are looking for, grasping and probing without wanting an end. The body tenses up, hardens, heaves and grapples, pistons and rods of a machine that has no idea of what it is trying to produce. Then it collapses, leaks, melts. There is left the coursing of the trapped blood, the flush of heat, the spirit vaporizing in exhalations.

This forceful depiction of lust aptly summarises the aforementioned manner in which bodily surges build towards a peak before they wane. The aimless gestures and subsequent collapse further illustrate a fleeting and

⁵⁴ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 10.

⁵⁵ Lingis, “Animal Body, Inhuman Face,” 116.

⁵⁶ Lingis, *Abuses*, 123–124, 127.

⁵⁷ Lingis, “Catastrophic Times,” 180. Emphasis added.

⁵⁸ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 122.

⁵⁹ Lingis, *The Imperative*, 16.

⁶⁰ Lingis, “Nietzsche and Animals,” 8.

⁶¹ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 108. Emphasis added.

⁶² Lingis, “Bestiality,” 68.

⁶³ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 10, 11.

⁶⁴ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 17.

⁶⁵ Lingis, *Abuses*, 118.

non-utilitarian expenditure of energy that comes to an end once the force of the passionate encounter has been spent.

Nevertheless, and in spite of the fleeting nature of passion, its effects can still be felt after it has come to pass. To be sure, Lingis seems to be less direct when it comes to his discussion of the lasting effects of passions. Nevertheless, since passions necessarily produce “discontinuities” in the rhythms of social life,⁶⁶ it would seem that their effects endure beyond their decline. On my reading, this happens in at least two ways. First, because, by Lingis’ own admission, everything we do in the present and future is marked by the weight of past experiences, bygone excesses inevitably leave a mark that “still [trails] behind us.”⁶⁷ For instance, the effects of passionate love linger even beyond the death of the loved one. This is especially evident in Lingis’ recollection of his encounter with a man by the name of Michael who, after having suffered the loss of his wife in a car accident, abandoned the rhythms of his past life and cycled aimlessly for months in a state of disconsolate mourning.⁶⁸ Second, impassioned states are also able to mobilise latent excessive forces present in language. To elaborate, up to this point I have discussed language as a tool that serves the interest of mercantile society. Nevertheless, Lingis also holds that impassioned experiences can give rise to a “voice that consecrates with words what rises before us.”⁶⁹ In other words, the very same utterances that function to place people in their determinate social roles can also serve as “oracular words” that harbour a powerful individuating force.⁷⁰ More precisely, for Lingis, the inner utterance “I am...” allows an individual to break with their relation to the past and to others in order to manifest a specific commitment that alters the very trajectory of life.⁷¹ By way of an example, the utterance “I am a dancer” shifts the trajectory of a life by unveiling previously untapped capacities which orient a body towards a specific future.⁷²

Time as experienced by the social self is essentially linear. Because, for Lingis, work and tasks create and structure linear time, emotions necessarily exist within an endless continuum “of time segmented into minutes, hours, and days ... in the time we experience as stretching back and containing our past actions and encounters and extending forward where foreseen plans and projects are inscribed.”⁷³ In other words, the time of social life is an anonymous time consisting of a sedimentation of past memories and future plans and calculations.

Passion, for Lingis, is however especially powerful in that it dissolves the linear movement of this measurable and predictable rhythms of the work and rationality of the social world, in order to “carve out space and time in distinctive ways.”⁷⁴ Lingis claims that passion is able to restructure time into what may be called an “impassioned time” consisting of a “bloated present, the immediate past, and the imminent future.”⁷⁵ A passionate outbreak “intensely and completely fills the present,” engorging it in such a way that one’s entire experience is engulfed by the event or object at hand.⁷⁶ This “bloated present” is nevertheless also flanked by an “immediate past” that distinguishes itself from the anonymous flow of passing events of mundane experience. In other words, the immediate past of an impassioned experience is owned as “my own past,” whereas the linear flow “of the social world and of nature recede into the common and anonymous past.”⁷⁷ For instance, according to Lingis, a past fit of impassioned rage recoils onto the present it flanks and marks the experiencer from within.⁷⁸ Additionally, the present is also accompanied by an “imminent future” that contrasts itself to the mundane “intermittent acts of calculation, planning, and reasoned decision.”⁷⁹ In a state of terror, for instance, a distinct imminent future stands

⁶⁶ See Lingis, *Body Transformations*, Chapter 1.

⁶⁷ Lingis, *Body Transformations*, 3; Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 72.

⁶⁸ Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 181–185.

⁶⁹ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 50.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Lingis, *First Person Singular* 40; Lingis, *Sensation*, 73.

⁷² Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 42.

⁷³ Lingis, *Irrevocable* 66. See also, 184.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 16.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

out by breaking with the mundane acts of calculation and planning.⁸⁰ It is important to note that while all impassioned states give rise to this new form of “impassioned time,” each different passion flows at “its own rate and pace.”⁸¹ This difference may be brought into relief by contrasting despair and terror. In a state of despair, time seems to race forward. Moments seem to lose their internal texture and contract into a swoop of undifferentiated instants. Conversely, terror has the effect of making everything feel as if it is flowing in slow motion by densely charging the moments of temporal movement.⁸²

Lingis further claims that impassioned states alter the Heideggerian sense of “practicable space” that is defined by social life and work.⁸³ As a movement that generates the self, passion generates a space that may be properly said to be one’s own by heightening a difference between the self, its impassioned object, and everything else. In other words, according to Lingis, various impassioned states such as “wonder, rage, terror, jealousy, and desolate mourning” are able to “mark out a territory where my life and my honor are cut off from what is not mine, where what is deserved is bounded from what is undeserved, where my intimates are separated from strangers.”⁸⁴ Again, it would be important to emphasise that different passions carve out space in distinct ways by manipulating proximities and peripheries.⁸⁵ For instance, terror may be said to contract space by closing a person in on themselves, while joy is expansive in that it extends one’s lived space “towards luminous horizons others do not see.”⁸⁶

As I have already shown, Lingis sees emotions as states that are incorporated into socio-cultural, utility driven, and rational systems. They are effectively “cultural artifacts,” since they were first established and systematised in the psychological, ethical, and legal discourse of the eighteenth century. They are also regarded as transitory, passive effects of bodily disturbances amenable to being neutralised by the surveying ego. In short, emotions are culturally loaded and historically situated. Unlike cultural relative and transitory emotional states, passions are universal, broadly understood. This universality may in turn be understood to incorporate two related nuances. First, and as I have already argued above, Lingis distinguishes between the limited view that a living organism is constituted by lack and need, and the intrinsic excesses that are said to define the very being of living bodies in general. As I have also shown, Lingis believes the latter to be the source of passion specifically. Now, if life is intrinsically excess, and if (channelled) excess becomes the impetus of passion, it follows that passions may be said to refer back to the basis of life itself and the excesses that come with it. This, in turn, entails that they are essentially “transhistorical and transcultural,”⁸⁷ in that they exceed the specific socio-cultural practices that systematise ordinary emotions. Stated differently, the force and form of passion cuts across the specificity of historical and social contexts, and thereby belong to the realm of bare life. In a passing nod to Nietzsche, Lingis emphasises that the “residues and resurgences” of passions manifest themselves “everywhere in the scientific, rational and utilitarian, and democratic societies of modern times.”⁸⁸ This, he claims, in turn explains why people who openly flout the dictates of social norms – for instance, the “rebelliousness of adolescents” and “carefreeness of children” – are often the cause of fascination and wonder.⁸⁹

More importantly, Lingis believes passions to be intrinsically shared. This aspect of passion may be substantiated by following Lingis in comparing it to what George Bataille calls the “festive.” Throughout his works, Bataille uses this notion to designate experiences such as “laughter, tears, poetry, tragedy and comedy, play, dance, music, ecstasy, the magic of childhood, the funereal horror, eroticism, ... the divine and the diabolical, the

⁸⁰ Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 66.

⁸¹ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 16.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 15.

⁸⁴ Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 66.

⁸⁵ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 16.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 68.

⁸⁸ Lingis, *Body Transformations*, 14.

⁸⁹ Lingis, *Body Transformations*, 7.

sacred of which sacrifice is the most intense aspect, intoxication, combat, crime, cruelty, disgust.”⁹⁰ For Bataille, as for Lingis, the field of the festive thus designates a region of life that is characterised by expenditure and excess, and therefore falls outside the realm of utility and is inherently relational. People laugh and weep together, and also find themselves gripped by the same movements of anxiety and exhilaration in dance, carnivals, or the theatre. All of these examples serve as clear indications that passion does not only rip through the social veil, but also opens individuals up to others in ways that rational and utilitarian schemas fail to capture or even disregard.⁹¹ For Lingis, it might therefore be better to understand others from different historical periods as well as different cultures by sharing in their passions, rather than through some *putatively*⁹² common form of discourse, language, or tradition.

Second, if the excesses of passions are truly the basis of all life in general, then their universality extends beyond the specificity of the human realm. This is why Lingis insists that “we share [passions] with other species, rabbits terrorized by dogs, enraged pheasants defending their chicks against predators, elephants and dolphins that mourn their dead.”⁹³ In short, passions transcend anthropocentric boundaries. Lingis reinforces this point by arguing that animal life is continuous with our own. In this context, he underscores that “the life in us understands the life in other ... The one word we use – life – to characterize all [animals] indicates that our bodies deeply feel kinship with the bodies of other animate species.”⁹⁴ Furthermore, he also argues that the passionate affective states of animals illuminate the character of our own. As I have already argued, human emotions are entangled with practico-rational considerations that conceal and blunt the force of passions. For instance, he notes that the parent’s love for a child can acquire an ambivalent character when considered through the lens of the various pressures that accompany professional ambitions. By contrast, the ferocity of a bird defending its nest or an elephant grieving its calf reveals the reality of impassioned attachment in a way that the complexities of human social life sometimes conceal.⁹⁵

By way of a conclusion to this section, and in order to illustrate and reinforce the difference between passion and emotion, one may refer to two distinct stories recounted by Lingis. The first anecdote, recounted in *The First Person Singular*,⁹⁶ speaks of an anonymous middle-aged woman who is married with children. One evening, her husband tells her that he is tired, and she encourages him to go to bed so that she can watch television in peace. As the images on the screen flicker before her, her mind wanders off. She thinks of the man at work for whom she has a crush, questions whether her husband truly loves her, and entertains the possibility that he might be having an affair. These initial doubts spiral endlessly. Her thoughts fester and wallow, descending through an endless lacuna of different emotional states. She analyses her life, her role, her self-worth, and attempts to locate herself within the confines of the emotional language available to her as the mundane rhythms of life plod on. In contrast, the second anecdote, found in “Aconcagua,”⁹⁷ recounts the story of a man named Miguel, who visits the psychotherapist Juan Aguilar. Like the woman in the previous story, Miguel is a successful middle-aged married man with children. He approaches Juan, convinced that he has all that life has to offer and yet cannot shake of the profound emptiness. Rather than pathologizing Miguel’s inner state through the codes of emotional language, Juan invites him on a hike up Cerro Aconcagua in Argentina. On the mountains, Miguel engages with a full range of impassioned states that surge through the encounter with the perils and beauty of the mountainous terrain. Both stories end without a specific closure. Lingis never tells us what the woman ultimately does with her life and marriage, and all that is revealed about Miguel is that he returns home to his family in Buenos Aires. Yet in Miguel’s case, Lingis closes by inviting the reader to speculate on how this impassioned encounter might have

⁹⁰ Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 71.

⁹¹ See Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 71–72; Lingis, *Body Transformations*, 140; Lingis, “Why Bataille Now?”.

⁹² I emphasise the word “putatively” here since Lingis insists that an alleged shared language “continually breaks into diverse tongues and dialects and multiplies technical languages and jargons” (Contact and Comm, 120). As a result, a so-called common language might turn out to be a source of division more than one of cohesion.

⁹³ Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 68.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁹⁵ Lingis, “Bestiality,” 62.

⁹⁶ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 94–95.

⁹⁷ Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 63–72.

transformed his entire life. Importantly, he emphasises that the climb could never have revealed to Miguel “the meaning of life and of the world.” Rather, it constituted a rupture with the mundane, thereby allowing for the impassioned encounter with “the inhuman, the destructive, [and] the indifference in the substance of reality” to reorient his life.⁹⁸

3 Passion, Culture, and Understanding

As my foregoing analysis has shown, Lingis treats impassioned states as forms of excess through which life’s hidden dimension becomes visible. These states carry a vitality that escapes the rationalized frameworks shaping social order and the mechanisms that tend to label intensity as pathology. In moments of impassioned rupture the ordinary social veil tears open and, for an instant, a fundamental truth about life’s force and exuberance is disclosed. Lingis however insists that this revelation is also, and especially, evident in “Homer, the Greek tragedies, medieval epics, Renaissance chronicles and theories of political power, and Elizabethan theatre,”⁹⁹ as well as “literature and drama viewed in theater, cinema, or television, as well as in the depictions of social and political conflicts, economic enterprises, and market trends diffused in the media.”¹⁰⁰ This claim requires some elaboration. For Lingis, historically, passions were seen to play a unique role in the formation of character. In the various works of literature just mentioned, the actions, fates, and conflicts of the characters arose through impassioned collisions. By contrast, and as I have shown, modern philosophy has continued to privilege the idea that an identical and continuous “self” persisted beneath its various emotional states.¹⁰¹ This move involved setting aside and pathologizing the impassioned states through which a true sense of self originally emerges, thereby reordering what was seen to count as an intelligible experience.

In this context, Lingis claims that the various narratives found in media, literature, and accounts of conflict ought to regain their philosophical relevance on account of the fact that they express an unorthodox understanding of life that society and rationality are invested in denying. That is to say, such cultural forms embrace the non-rationality, absurdity, catastrophe, and contingency that they take to be central and inevitable elements of human existence. Clearly, Lingis does not believe this to be some accidental feature of narrative, since he argues that they provide the stories through which one then interprets their own affective history. This in turn supplies them with a vocabulary that can register passions and allow them to reverberate through memory in order to give shape to their identity. For Lingis, true experiences cannot be explained through the philosophical formulation of some putative final cause, or the “psycho-chemical, magnetic, and electrical impulses, instinct and drives, or social forces.”¹⁰² Rather, we are essentially the stories that are told to us and that we tell ourselves and others, and the new impassioned experiences that give rise to different stories define our futures and “induce us to realign the plot.”¹⁰³

If the force of these claims are acknowledged, an interesting critique of philosophical discourse would follow. In a nod to Nietzsche, Lingis seems to imply that philosophy is oftentimes guilty of providing “justification of the rational and civic individual,”¹⁰⁴ thereby perpetuating the narratives of “mercantile society” its economic practices based on utility and exchange value. Conversely, “news reports, literature, and cinema produce overall representations that justify many ways of thinking and living, including lives of violence.”¹⁰⁵ Lingis therefore questions whether the philosopher today is not better off enlisting the disruptive force of narrative in order to amplify and cultivate the passions that, from time to time, rip through gossamer veil of mundane social life.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 72.

⁹⁹ Lingis, *First Person Singular*, 10.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 11.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 10.

¹⁰² Ibid., 55.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 54.

¹⁰⁴ Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 197–198.

¹⁰⁵ Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 198.

The force of Lingis' somewhat rhetorical question here becomes clearer when one pushes a point made throughout the course of this paper, namely the fact that social life essentially relies on the image a stable, rational, and calculative self, and that impassioned states threaten such an image. The pathologization of passions thus sustains its particular (avaricious) model of subjectivity by excluding the forms of impassioned rupture that threaten it. As Lingis' question indicates, the pathologization of passion becomes a quintessentially philosophical problem. He claims that paying attention to specific moments of passion can reveal the truth laying beneath the codes and operations of socialised life. Various cultural depictions of contingency are especially good at emphasising the importance of passionate outbursts, since such narratives regularly attribute the most important and decisive turns in a life to contingency and luck rather than rational calculation or merit. Passions, for Lingis, are always "distributed to humans by chance,"¹⁰⁶ and in this way impassioned states resemble birth, life, death, and all the other entities in the cosmos more generally, since they too are the result of coincidence.¹⁰⁷ The great works of literature and the media are therefore an indispensable asset to the philosopher, since they complicate rationalist accounts of life by presenting human existence as something that is fundamentally shaped by contingent and irrational forces.

4 Conclusion

The analysis developed throughout the course of this paper aims to clarify and expand Lingis' understanding of impassioned states, in order to show how his account reframes the relation between affective experience and the structures of modern social life. As I have shown, impassioned states mark punctuated instances when the regulated rhythms of social life succumb to the forces of life that transgress them. These moments serve to reveal the essential instability and contingency of social norms, and the manner in which it masks the actual forces that come to shape a life. Punctuated moments of passion in turn unveil the manner in which the self can only take form through these intensities that are then carried over through the stories that are recalled, read, seen, and told.

Lingis' understanding and evaluation of passion has clear consequences for the manner in which philosophy should deal with the contemporary tendency to pathologize and overregulate intense affective states. Pathologization suppresses and inhibits life's forces by interpreting them through coded categories designed to secure the goals of society. Conversely, he invites the reader to consider passions as an integral aspect of human existence, since they ultimately illuminate the real forces that shape both individual lives as well as communal – or com-passionate – ones. Lingis' writing on passion and its pathologization may be seen to inaugurate a call for novel forms of philosophy that are capable of acknowledging and mobilising the contingencies, vulnerabilities and shared intensities that animate human (as well as non-human) life. He may be seen to offer a novel conception of agency attuned to the processes of life in general, as opposed to the narrow codes, constructs, and models of practico-rational conduct. In the end, he enjoins us to reconsider the relationship between excess and pathology. Rather than viewing the former as a fundamental disturbance to be coded, measured, and managed by the latter, he treats it as a source of intuitions concerning the nature of being. In this context, the arts and various events recounted in the media play a fundamental role in demonstrating the value of impassioned experience, as well as its irrationalities, contingencies, and excesses.

As I see it, by drawing attention to passion, Lingis is not encouraging us to be overcome by passions all the time. Nor does he seem to believe that it is even possible to do so, especially when considering that he constantly depicts such states as marked but also intermittent. Concomitantly, he is also not suggesting that passions and the social veil name a fundamental distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity respectively, for he holds that every surge of passion that tears through the social veil eventually sinks back beneath its surface even as its effects ripple through time. Rather, Lingis' thought encourages us to embrace fleeting surges of passion, since their excesses reveal a vitality that precedes all social coding and demands. Passions therefore open up a space

¹⁰⁶ Lingis, *Irrevocable*, 31.

¹⁰⁷ Lingis, *First Person Singular* 5, 6; Lingis, "Contact," 451.

where wonder, rage, disconsolate mourning, elation, and impassioned courage mark the real contours of life, reminding us that a life that is truly worth living can only be lived in the throes of passion.

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