



Warren D. TenHouten, *Alienation and Affect*, London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017, 214 pages

Luca Ciccarese

Volume 21, numéro 1, 2017

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1041339ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1041339ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Georg Simmel Gesellschaft

ISSN

1616-2552 (imprimé)

2512-1022 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Ciccarese, L. (2017). Compte rendu de [Warren D. TenHouten, *Alienation and Affect*, London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017, 214 pages]. *Simmel Studies*, 21(1), 115–119. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1041339ar>

REVIEWS

Luca Ciccamese

Warren D. TenHouten, *Alienation and Affect*, London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017, 214 pages.

In *Alienation and Affect*, author Warren D. TenHouten tries to identify a synthesis between alienation theory and the sociology of emotions. From his perspective, the concept of alienation lacks specificity, and the fact that it intertwines with emotions tends to be disregarded or taken for granted by most of the scientific literature in the field. TenHouten also contends that the vague nature of the concept of alienation tends to remain implicit in its historical trajectory.

In the first section of the book the author retraces the intellectual history of alienation starting from the ancient world and focuses on the development of the concept over time, with particular attention to Rousseau's conception of alienation, characterized by a marked propensity for the emotional sphere and on the related socio-psychological mechanisms. During the enlightenment/romanticism debate, the thought of Rousseau was valued and expanded by romanticists, who made him their "high priest". Alienation then became a critical instrument in the hands of romanticists, useful for illustrating the challenges of enlightenment doctrine, such as the separation between matter and mind, man and nature, emotion and reason. In this sense, Romanticism and Sentimentalism were the first movements to use this concept on a regular basis, and TenHouten identifies this phase as a turning point in the historical journey of the concept. Alienation enters into general use in the 18th century, especially after the efforts of Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx and Engels, but also Smith and Ferguson. These scholars dealt with the concept in different ways, some, like Hegel for example, emphasized the alienation of self as a necessary evil in order to achieve the full

development of mind and society through subsequent dialectical transformations and reconciliations; others underlying the economic nature, and roots, of human alienation and meaninglessness. TenHouten continues to discuss the intellectual trajectory of the concept by following its development in the 19th century. In this phase the concept gradually becomes a more critical instrument in the thought of renowned social scientists like Simmel, Tönnies and Weber. The main focus of these scholars was, indeed, on the alienating conditions of modernity, generating, for Simmel, a threefold shift: 1) from ends to means used to attain them, 2) from emotion to reason, and 3) from the subjective to the objective mind. Weber expands Simmel's insights, describing the Western crisis, which he explains, is crisis in terms of meaninglessness and coherence due to the incessant progression of bureaucracy, capitalism and science, combined with the process of secularization. Finally, at the end of the first part of the book, TenHouten illustrates the increasing interest in alienation with the advent of the New Left between 1950 and 1960. Nevertheless, TenHouten underlines how the concept gained a certain prominence throughout the years despite the fact that its methodological foundation was uncertain and its ambiguities remained unresolved.

For this reason, and from this conceptual and intellectual impasse, TenHouten opens the second part of the book, which aims to give a scientific backbone to the concept of alienation. Towards this end, the second part of the book makes two important contributions: 1) it illustrates the more recent advances in emotion theory, offering to the reader a clear classification of emotions that includes primary, secondary and tertiary emotions, in order of complexity; 2) following Seeman's five alienation varieties, TenHouten focuses on each one – normlessness, self-estrangement, meaninglessness, cultural estrangement, powerlessness – exploring their connections with different combinations of primary, secondary and tertiary

emotions. Through this analytical exercise TenHouten expands Seeman's original insights, introducing two more varieties of alienation which result from the subtypes of normlessness and cultural estrangement. In a broad sense, TenHouten is able to shift from a generalist and unidimensional interpretation of alienation, to a more specific and multidimensional concept, involving both cognition and emotion, and which is rooted in a socio-psychological foundation rather than on structural factors and contingencies. The focus on socio-psychological elements is particularly clear when the author combines Plutchik, McLean emotions models with Fiske's social relation model together in his *Affect Spectrum Theory*, in order to reinforce the sociological weaknesses and produce an intersection between mind and society with particular reference to the classification of emotions. From this perspective, such an intersection appears to be especially useful for overcoming some points of divergence between psychology and the sociology of emotions. As mentioned above, in the last part of the book TenHouten focuses on each of the five specific varieties of alienation described by Seeman rather than on alienation in general, interpreting and discussing each one of them in light of the classification of emotions proposed previously. This operation enables conceptual connections to be made between each kind of alienation with different sets of primary, secondary and tertiary emotions. On a more general level, the author succeeds in linking a total of 31 (8 primary, 17 secondary, 6 tertiary) emotions to seven kinds of alienation. Far from considering this statement as an end in itself, TenHouten continues his analysis by identifying two main clusters of alienation varieties as a result of the overlap of primary and secondary emotions. Particularly on one side three of the seven kinds of alienation (normlessness¹, cultural estrangement¹, meaninglessness) seem to share the same affective bases; on the other side the four remaining varieties (normlessness², cultural estrangement², self-estrangement, powerlessness) share a different affective basis. TenHouten

justifies this evidence underlying the opposite orientation of the emotions associated by looking at the dividing line between *externally oriented* and *internally oriented* emotions. From this perspective, the affective basis of the first cluster appears to be externally focused, meaning that these emotions are oriented toward action in the social field, while the second cluster shares an internally focused affective basis, meaning that the emotions are primarily directed towards the self.

An important contribution of this book is the author's firm willingness to explore the concept of alienation systematically, starting from its roots. Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4 guide the reader through the different meanings attached to the concept of alienation during various stages of intellectual history. However, what clearly emerges from the first part of the book is the ambiguous, oft taken for granted, and unidimensional nature of the concept, which appears to be 1) strictly intertwined with the emotional sphere, and 2) permeated by subtle and hidden romantic or critical assumptions. Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 are the author's attempt to give the concept of alienation a scientific backbone that usefully combines cognitive and emotional features. To that end, TenHouten, deconstructs the concept following Seeman's insights, and focuses on each of its "subjective" components, inextricably linked with the emotional sphere. The findings are crucial since this analytical operation allows the author to 1) identify two more subtypes of alienation in addition to Seeman's five, and 2) construct two different clusters of alienation that result from their different connections with their emotional components.

A minor shortcoming of the book is probably its overemphasis on the analytic presentation and dissertation of the various sets of primary, secondary, and tertiary emotions connected to each of the varieties of alienation, which may be difficult for readers without a background in psychology. On the other hand, giving greater consideration and emphasis to the conclusions would have been a means to thoroughly arguing the

implications of the findings in a broader sense, given the interest of sociologists and psychologists in this topic.

Luca Serafini

Mariano Longo, *Fiction and Social Reality. Literature and Narratives as Sociological Resources*, Routledge, 2015, 176 pages.

This book by Mariano Longo provides a useful tool for methodological analysis of the productive use sociology can make of narratives, whether understood as everyday stories about subjective experiences or as literary fictions. Given the theoretical scope of the topic, Longo's text necessarily positions itself as a wider reflection on the cognitive value of literature and on the epistemological borders defining the similarities and differences between the various human sciences. Indeed, the object of narrative and/or analysis of both literature and sociology, despite different methods and objectives, is the human being, understood as an individual who acts in a social environment and within a network of relationships.

Accordingly, the first two chapters of the book investigate which characteristics of stories in general, and of literary ones in particular, contain elements of relevant cognitive value, and how these can be structurally related to social research. Longo stresses first and foremost that ever since the so-called "narrative turn", storytelling is now considered a constitutive element of the experience that subjects make of their world. Narrative implies that certain items from the chaotic and fragmented reality of daily experience are selected, given an order and systematized on the basis of cause-and-effect, temporal relationships. Their connection also generally implies a transmission of specific ideas and values. Expressed in other terms, as noted by Roland Barthes among others, storytelling is a "meaning construction process". This also applies to narratives without any direct reference to reality, such as literary ones.