

Book Review: The Mood of the World
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I remember people gathering in 2016 to discuss how “the world is falling apart” when they realized, and tried to get over, the surprise of the Brexit election result. In many respects, this memory captures what is central to this original and insightful book: the shifts and the power of collective moods. In *The Mood of the World*, sociologist Heinz Bude argues that moods should not be seen as merely personal feelings. On the contrary, ‘the mood forms the basic tone or general condition of the understanding and experience of an objectivity that challenges the self to become itself’ (p.10). Someone’s mood is not purely arbitrary but arises from the situation he or she is in. Accordingly, through the process of creating and capturing a person’s own mood, he would thus be able to understand his own existence.

Bude’s book commences with a broad analysis on the mood of the current situation and the function of collective moods. He notes that people live and make everyday decisions not only through reason or based on theory but also because of their feelings and emotions. Moreover, mood acts as a key component for the human being as a whole. Instead of intellect, people structure and find themselves as a part of the world through collective experiences. As Bude points out: ‘... mood exists in the situation that I am in and through which I understand myself’ (p.27), mood is the way I am in the world. Depending on my mood, I would be able to act and believe in anything or nothing. This influences not only individuals, but also societies as a whole. Thus, Bude locates the power of mood within the expression in people’s opinions. For example, when it comes to politics, the mood of the moment often decides election results. It reveals both a sense of the world and a feeling of self. Rather than viewing mood as belonging to the private realm, Bude’s original and thought-provoking use of mood as a new criteria of judgment provides a theoretical perspective for examining social changes.

In *The Mood of the World*, the broad analysis of uniform collectives is followed by chapters that narrow down and deal specifically with mood in terms of generations, outsiders, sexes and the future. In the chapter focusing on the sexes, for example, Bude notes that ‘the feeling of the world is always the feeling of the sexes’ (p.75), and the mood of society is usually something that documented the fashion of sexes. In modern society, everyone determines sexual identities in their own way and won’t let others tell them what to do. Therefore, in order to understand people’s sexual identities, the context of the mood among sexes must be taken into consideration. The power of mood is significant in the area of immigration as well. Based on the sense of power, the established often ‘observe the outsiders with a mood of supercilious apprehension, resentful intentness and stubborn inflexibility’ (p.67). Bude argues that conflicts between the established and outsiders arise from this mutual apathy and misunderstanding of mood. The hierarchy of power in mood is also revealed in Bude’s observation of different generational mood-tendencies. Since different situations and expectations elicit different moods, each generation has developed its own philosophy of life and mind. At the end of the book, Bude tries to locate the mood of the future. He suggests that the future generation will be a generation of seeking new openings. They will be neither the ‘fantasies of total power’ nor ‘escapers in egocentric mysticism’. As Bude concludes: ‘openness to the world without self-negation’ (p.94), full life with minimum doctrines is the mood of the future.

This book raises some very inspiring ideas about the power of the mood and mood swings in these highly unstable times. Certainly, it is worth seriously considering the return of mood as a category in the humanities. Many of the observations that Bude makes indicate that a sociology of mood can describe and help us to explain how the public mood influences and affect change in modern societies. Indeed, based on a concise literature review, this book

provides a series of in-depth observations that could be extended to further research in areas related to politics, history and social movements. However, Bude's book is largely focused on the white western world. Although most of his points are really apt to contemporary North American and European countries, the lack of cultural and geographical diversity should be taken into consideration.

Overall, the book is written in an elegant and slightly intense style suitable for both academic and wider audiences. In fact, different from other traditional angles in sociology, Bude has introduced a critical perspective on mood, which could be used to examine key social conditions and help people understand the anxiety and uncertainty in modern society. For this reason alone, his book deserves a wide readership.

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