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Thinking critically about affect in organization studies: Why it matters

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Abstract

Affect holds the promise of destabilizing and unsettling us, as organizational subjects, into new states of being. It can shed light on many aspects of work and organization, with implications both within and beyond organization studies. Affect theory holds the potential to generate exciting new insights for the study of organizations, theoretically, methodologically and politically. This Special Issue seeks to explore these potential trajectories. We are pleased to present five contributions that develop such ideas, drawing on a wide variety of approaches, and invoking new perspectives on the organizations we study and inhabit. As this Special Issue demonstrates, the world of work offers an exciting landscape for studying the ‘pulsing refrains of affect’ that accompany our lived experiences.

Keywords: Affect, ethics, organizations, politics, embodiment, intersubjectivity, workplace

Affect exists in resonances and rhythms, transpiring ‘within and across the subtlest of shuttling intensities’, born in in-between-ness and as a gradient of bodily capacity (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010:2). It can be thought of as that which ‘sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values and objects’ (Ahmed, 2010:31). Affect marks our bodies. As Seigworth and Gregg explain:

‘...affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves... Affect is persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations.’ (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010: 1)

The critical theorization of affect is concerned with what occurs when bodies encounter each other; affect is what hits us when we walk into a room and inexplicably sense an atmosphere (Brennan, 2004). It is what is evoked by bodily experiences as they pass from person to person, in a way that is contagious but remains unspoken. A yawn or a smile can travel between subjects, often increasing in its intensity as it does so (Tomkins, 1963). Hence affect is a force that places people in a co-subjective circuit of feeling and sensation, rather than standing alone and independent; in this way affect highlights our interdependencies (Brennan, 2004).

Whilst affect has become a burgeoning area of study in positivistic and normatively orientated strands of organizational behaviour its potential to elucidate the ethical, political and, indeed, elusive dimensions of organizations is yet to be realised. Critical theorists of organizations have only started to integrate and explore recent developments in affect theory from diverse fields including cultural studies, feminism, queer theory and psychoanalysis. Affect permeates organizations profoundly, influencing people’s motivation, their political behaviour, decision-making and relationships with leaders and followers.

Analysis of organizations and affect from a critical perspective is nascent, but we now witness a growing interest as evidenced by the large number of international as well as empirically and theoretically diverse submissions to recent conference subthemes, on topics such as affect and the psychosocial (Fotaki et al., 2013); affective ontologies (Komporozos-

Athanasίου et al., 2014); and affect, embodiment and diversity (Van den Brink et al., 2016). Affect presents us with the promise of a state of becoming that can potentially destabilize and unsettle us into new states of being (Massumi, 1996). As such, it stands to generate exciting trajectories for the study of organization, promising new theoretical directions, methodological approaches and radical potential for critical investigation. Indeed, affect has influenced other fields of social science in these ways over the past 15 years (Ahmed, 2004; Berlant, 2011; Butler, 1997; Clough, 2006; Massumi, 1996; Probyn, 2010; Sedgwick, 2003; Thrift, 2012).

Affect theorists argue that we must pay attention to experiences of bodily displacement, the movement *between* bodily states and the intensities that this evokes (Deleuze, 1997; Massumi, 2002). For Deleuze, this means considering the patterns or ‘maps of intensity’ that result; the rhythms of life that emerge and can become meaningful in their repetition. The study of affect, attempts to evoke these states of being, rather than to analyze their later discursive representation as emotions. Since affect is excess it escapes discursive capture and naming. In other words, it is about an aspect of bodily experience that eludes interpretation by language, escaping its logic and refusing to conform to its expectations (Deleuze, 1997). Bruns (2002) explains how affect leading to laughter foregrounds the unexpected that throws us off balance, that unsettles us into becoming someone other than who we currently are and before the resulting intensities have been categorized and named as emotions.

The concepts of emotion and affect are often used loosely and interchangeably in organization studies, and there is an inherent tendency to categorize these states of being into typologies of emotion. Such scholarly approaches can freeze affective experience and destroy its import (Deleuze, 2005; Massumi, 2002). They lead us to miss the ways affect allows us to see, anew, the ‘texture’ of the world, as it is lived and experienced. For this reason, the distinction between the two is important and, while we acknowledge the relevance of ongoing work on emotions for organization studies (Barsade and Gibson, 2007; Elfenbein, 2008; Fineman, 2003, 2004, 2010; Loseke, 2009; Stearns and Stearns, 1985; Wright and Nyberg, 2012), for the purpose of this Special Issue, we distinguish it from affect and focus on the latter. Because affect theories have emerged from critically-oriented disciplines as diverse as psychoanalysis, cultural studies and feminism, but also from the bio-sciences, we recognize that there is no ‘absolute’ definition of affect (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010: 3), although some distinct theoretical trajectories have emerged that are briefly outlined next.

Critical theorizations of affect: Themes and trajectories

A number of disciplines have taken up the question of affect in complementary and contrasting ways. These different strands emerge, undulate and sometimes overlap in their approaches (Seighworth and Gregg, 2010). For the purposes of this special issue we outline the trajectories that have particularly influenced the study of work and organization. Firstly, a notable strand emanates from psychoanalysis. Scholars have drawn inspiration from psychoanalysis and psychodynamics to understand the social implications of affective impulses. These perspectives hold that although we may not be aware of our compulsion to do so, we tend to psychically ‘invest’ in particular symbolic elements, and these investments operate at the level of affect. Theorists such as Judith Butler (1997a,b) focus on the relational aspects and implications of affect; she introduces the notion of power to enrich our understanding of intersubjective affective dynamics. As she notes, we possess ‘passionate attachments’ to particular forms of power, which are often necessary preconditions of our recognition as subjects (Butler, 2007a). She uses the example of gay and lesbian people to explain how such affective attachments can even lead us to adopting injurious identities manifested in being called ‘names’, in order to be recognized and exist socially (Butler, 2007b). In introducing a power dimension into conceptions of affect she broadens our understanding of the operation of power and domination in social life, and demonstrates how passionate engagements connect us to broader social structures.

Somewhat contrasting with this approach, a second strand of affect theory emerges from non-humanist philosophical traditions focused on the interlinkages between matter in flux and ‘processual incorporeality’ (Blackman, 2008a: 7, citing Spinoza). Taking a less psychically grounded and subject-focused view of affect (Blackman, 2008a), these perspectives see it as something of a visceral force, or a vector, that operates between bodies (Sedgwick and Frank, 1995). Affects are autonomous from the subject, somewhat automatic and necessarily reflexive (Blackman, 2008a: 16; Massumi, 1996; 2002). Massumi illustrates the idea of affects as relating to bodily capacities. He describes automatic, bodily responses that point to forces that existed prior to the subject, existing in the realm of the virtual: both indeterminate and emergent (Massumi, 2010; Probyn, 2010; see Beyes and De Cock, this issue, for a discussion of colour-as-affect and its power in organizational life). While these authors do not neglect the factors leading to the social and political conditioning of affect, their focus is the

neurophysiological and psychological aspects of affect transmission that exceed a singular body, aiming to better understand relationality (Blackman, 2008b). Hence they assert the importance of affective transmission within contemporary theory, and object to its disavowal or denial (Blackman, 2008b; Connolly, 2002; Massumi, 2002).

A third approach overlaps with the above in its Spinozan-Deleuzian theoretical heritage, and involves the new vitalist strand in feminist theory that is reflected in the work of Rosi Braidotti and Elizabeth Grosz. Braidotti draws on Deleuze's idea of spatiality to redefine subjectivity as an insatiable desire for freedom that can only be achieved through an endless becoming. Accordingly, this creates potentialities for self-expression, which are co-constituted through multiple relationships/configurations and an endless capacity to affect others and be affected by them (Braidotti, 2006). Grosz (2004) has argued that the subject cannot be simply considered as culturally inscribed, asking us to problematize which are the bodies and what is in their nature that makes such an inscription possible, in order to explain the conditions of possibility enabling an endless constitution and reconstitution of subjects (Grosz, 2004: 2). Intimately tied to evolutionary research, her project connects the philosophies of Darwin, Nietzsche and Bergson, to make possible the idea of 'temporal becoming' (2004: 8).

Finally, the critical potential for affect 'to transform the world we live in' (Hemmings, 2005: 550) is a growing concern within affect theory and relates to a strand that emphasizes 'politically engaged work' (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010:7). This is partly due to the heavy influence of feminist and queer theory, both of which place importance on politics and resistance to normativizing power. Thus affect theory stands in contrast to other approaches including poststructuralist accounts which ignore the material aspects of power. For example, scholars emphasize the potential transformative properties of affects such as shame by showing how it can be creatively appropriated and reworked to evoke pride (Sedgwick, 2003), in ways that have generative effects that can relate to situations even beyond homophobia. Affect theory therefore provides interesting and potentially fruitful provocations for critical organization scholars.

It is these potentialities that our Call for Papers for this Special Issue sought to explore, by engaging with theoretical perspectives and critiques of affect, developing methodological approaches evoked by the concept, and interrogating the potential of affect for the critical,

ethical and political investigation of organizations. We saw potential in each of these directions and in what follows, we briefly explain our choice of focus and the decisions made for exploring these directions of enquiry and specific themes, before introducing the selected articles comprising this Special Issue.

Affect and organization studies: theoretical, methodological and critical potential

Theoretical

From the perspective of organization theory, affect emphasizes the intersubjective transmission of intensity: that which exists between bodies. Subjects are interlinked in circuits of experience; affect connects us to those around us in ways that are extra-linguistic. Herein, we felt, lay a number of potential avenues for thinking differently about the subject and the social. These include, for example, a problematization of the notion of self-contained, autonomous individuality that persists within identity studies (Brennan, 2004), and that represents an important concern for critical organization scholarship. From the perspective of psychoanalysis, scholars have already begun to explore the potential of affect to deepen our understanding of subjectivity (see Dashtipour and Vidaillet, this issue, for a discussion of affective suffering, ‘ordinary sublimation’ and the body in relation to work and organization; see also Clancy et al., 2012; Fotaki et al., 2012; Harding, 2007; Kenny, 2010; 2012; Müller, 2013; Vachhani, 2012; Vidaillet, 2007; Voronov and Vince, 2012) and psychosocial studies (Kenny and Fotaki, 2014). The ‘psycho-social’ approach to affect has implications in a wide range of organizational settings (Gabriel, 2014; Harding and Lee, 2014), including for example health care, where it can help us to understand the affective nature of trust underpinning patient and doctor relationships, or even the systemic trust extended to institutions such as the National Health Service (the NHS), for instance (Fotaki, 2014). But there is also a darker undertone to these affective entanglements with power structures. For example, affective, passionate attachments to dominant discourses can influence how people in third sector organizations behave, for example causing them to defer to the wishes of powerful donors even as they criticize such actions (Kenny, 2012).

We also recognized that for others, affect offered novel ways of moving beyond the inherent pessimism of poststructuralist theory and its perceived emphasis on the domination of the subject by power (Sedgwick, 2003). This is seen in, for example, Braidotti’s and Grosz’s work discussed briefly above, and in the affective borderspaces proposed by Bracha Ettinger

that organizational researchers have begun to draw on in order to re-theorize organizational ethics (Kenny and Fotaki, 2015; Pullen and Rhodes, 2015; Fotaki and Harding, forthcoming – discussed below). Thanem and Wallenberg (2015) also contribute to this emerging trajectory of research by proposing an embodied ethics of organizational life through reading Spinoza’s affective ethics. The authors follow his theory of the good, powerful and joyful life by asking what bodies can do to achieve this by voicing their opposition to the ethics of recognition, which they regard as representing neither a moral rule system nor an infinite duty to recognize the other.

In addition, affect theory suggests new approaches to the ways in which we represent organizations, away from the use of static concepts that reify and freeze the complexity and intricacy of embodied experience. Affective apprehensions of social life involve communicating experiences of existence, rather than representing and trapping such experiences within the confines of discourse (Guattari, 1995). Organization scholars have proposed new ways of thinking about how we write about, and represent organizations, that move beyond ideas of constraint and closure (Beyes and Steyaert, 2012, 2103; Borch; 2010; O’Doherty, 2008; Hjorth and Pelzer, 2007; Vachhani, 2015). Walkerdine (2010, 2014), uses object relations theory alongside Guattari’s (1988) sensorial-affective schizo-analytic cartographies to explain how we inhabit a particular space and time, through our affective and sensory experience of it. She draws on a psychoanalytically-inspired theorization of affect as the bodily sensorial stimulation leading to the experience of pleasure and pain avoidance, in order to show how this can represent the foundation of relational regularities and patterns. She applies this to better understand the embodied affective place (or places) in which a sense of existing is produced (Walkerdine, 2014). Organization scholars have drawn only limited inspiration from these ideas to date.

A further strand has emerged in organizational scholarship aiming to combine notions as diverse as the unconscious and the bio-sciences. For instance, Barsade et al. (2009) integrate the construct of implicit affect—with a more conscious emotional experience—into the field of organizational behavior. This reflects a transdisciplinary intellectual shift emerging out of the ‘textual turn’, towards an intensified interest in ‘emotions, feelings, and affect (and their differences)’ as objects of ‘scholarly inquiry’ (Cvetkovich, 2012: 133). This shift is premised on challenging ‘the scientific superiority of “detached reason” and “objective observation” over the emotional and the subjective’ foregrounding the ‘resurgence of empirical and

theoretical interest in emotions’ (Greco and Stenner, 2008: 5, quoted in Pedwell and Whithead, 2012).

Finally, the focus on the intercorporeal, embodied nature of affective experience chimes with recent work on the body in organizations, in which scholars have argued against the ubiquitous tendency to write the body out of our accounts of organizational life. Of particular interest is the strand of feminist-inspired insights into the inter-corporeal transmission of affect in organizations (Pullen and Rhodes, 2015). In the editorial prefacing the closely related Special Issue on ‘Ethics, Embodiment and Organizations’ also published in *Organization*, its authors observe that organizational scholars have for too long neglected the importance of affectual relations, care, compassion or any form of feeling that is pre-reflexively experienced through the body. These omissions frequently relate to how the body is theorised in organization studies, omitting affect or even the sexuatedness of discourse as an embodied practice (Fotaki et al. 2014; Vachhani, 2012). The editors argue that this begs the rethinking of ethics in organizations from an embodied perspective. Kenny and Fotaki (2015) respond to this call by drawing their inspiration from the work of Bracha Ettinger a feminist artist, philosopher and psychoanalyst. Specifically, the authors translate her concept of the matrixial borderspace denoting a material, affective and symbolic structure, into organizational vocabulary, to replace the notion of the individualized separate subject with the idea of trans- or inter-subjectivity; this is then used to explore the development of a corporeal ethics of relationality for organization studies. Vachhani (2013) explores how cultural practices, especially craft, practices, can be understood as an affective politics through the resurrection of forgotten pasts.

In their forthcoming co-authored book, Fotaki and Harding (2017) introduce recent developments in feminist theory (including the work of Braidotti and Ettinger), to theorize contemporary organizations where amongst others, the authors develop the organizational ethics of relationality through the prism of affect. Their central argument rests on the premise that individuals are affected by others without whom the notions of collective life, and even subjectivity itself, are meaningless as we cannot exist but in relation to others. These contributions notwithstanding, research on affect in relation to ethics continues to be an under-researched field of organization studies, despite its potential to offer novel insights to address the organizational and social (see Pullen, Rhodes and Thanem, this issue, for a discussion of the body, relational ontology and affective politics).. In contrast, we argue that

considerations of how affect emerges, travels and is transmitted between bodies are essential for understanding a range of issues relating to ethics, including the materiality of the body and relations of care in organizations and society (see Vachhani, 2012, 2014).

Methodological

Alongside new theoretical directions, the concept of affect opens up our ways of thinking about method. Affect enables an appreciation of, and a way to communicate, the texture of embodied life as it is lived: its qualitative richness (Sedgwick, 2003). In so doing, the researcher herself is open to becoming affected by encounters, rather than simply reporting them (McCormack, 2008), and this demands innovative and experimental approaches to how we approach and study organizations and organizing (see Ashcraft, this issue, for a critique of neoliberalism and exploration of ordinary affects and precarious resistance in academic labour). It also evokes questions of how this might be done, for example, how can intercorporeal, situated experiences represent the ‘sticky pragmatics of right now, right here’? (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010:14).

Outside of organization studies, scholars suggest innovative approaches to how affect can be discerned from patterns emerging in the observation of social life; these include ‘mattering maps’ (Grossberg: 2010: 316), ‘bloom spaces’ (Stewart, 2010) and ‘ethical noticing’ (Berlant, 2011). It is crucial to pose methodological questions relating to the empirical study of affect, particularly given that the concepts discussed above are typically theoretical and abstract in nature. Of late, a small number of organization scholars have explored affect’s potential for researching ‘the intensities and forces of organizational life’ (Beyes and Steyaert, 2012: 52; see also Gabriel, 2014; Wood and Brown, 2012).

Critical approaches to affect

Finally, affect offers rich and diverse approaches to the critical study of organizations and their role in society. Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism* (2011) discusses life for precarious, low-wage workers in the U.S. She shows how affect theory can help us to apprehend people’s struggles with job insecurity and uncertainty, in which mere adjustment and day-to-day survival takes all of one’s energy. In such circumstances people can merely tread water and watch previously-held fantasies of the good life fade away. Continuing with critiques of capitalist organizations, Thrift (2012) points out that commodities are today increasingly designed to deliberately incorporate affective features; affect ties the consumer both to the purchase and

to the enjoyment of the product. Capitalism therefore attempts to incorporate the excess produced by affective experience (Massumi, 2002), an idea that has influenced organization scholars (Hjorth and Pelzer, 2007). Relatedly, some authors show how affect highlights the ways in which taken-for-granted aspects of organizational design, including space and architecture, can be political in nature (Borch, 2010; see Michels, this issue, for an exploration of affective atmospheres). Affect is key in understanding how individuals' imagination and social imaginaries work through the constitution of dominant images and meanings underpinning organizational relations (Komporezos-Athanasidou and Fotaki, 2015), or through their attachments to dominant narratives, particularly if these originate in fantasy (see work by Anderson, 1991, on Imagined Communities, or the performative power of affective discourses of choice for all in public health policy – Fotaki, 2006). For Kenny and Scriver (2012), the affective pull of compelling discourses of entrepreneurship influence how people in Ireland perceive the country's future, post-financial crisis, and prevent alternative viewpoints; the authors draw on Laclau and Mouffe to explain this.

This also suggests that interventions into the affective realm are essential for bringing about social change, not least because the embodied experience of affect and the excess it produces can throw our existing ways of knowing and being 'off-balance'; it can disturb us (Probyn, 2010). This indeterminate movement enables subjects to escape forms of subjection, and potentially transform relations of domination. Queer and feminist theorists draw upon this idea in order to focus on the experience of shame, highlighting the bodily resonances of homophobia (Probyn, 2000). In addition, scholars of race expose how embodied experiences of exclusion offer potential for critique and, in some cases, for challenging domination (Ahmed, 2000). Authors highlight how, for example, community can be created from shared experiences of affect; 'it is the very failure of affect to be located in a subject or object that allows it to generate the surfaces of collective bodies' (Ahmed, 2004:128).

In organization studies, the work of Hardt, Negri and Lazzarato have brought critical potential to the study of immaterial labour and the production and manipulation of affect. These approaches give rise to rich theoretical and empirical analyses of the transformations of capitalism and the changing nature, form and organization of labour which in turn reconfigure the political organization of workers and their resistance (Dowling et al, 2007:1). Others argue for a rethinking of the measures and value of affective labour under contemporary capitalism (Clough et al, 2007).

Critiques of affect

While we see the potential for organization studies along these theoretical, methodological and critical lines, we acknowledge that affect, as the concept has been taken up in neighbouring disciplines, is not without its critics. For some, affect is a useful theory when deployed in the appropriate context, but affect theorists grant too much power to this way of seeing the world, overlooking the fact that other perspectives can illuminate ideas, for example of co-subjective existence, equally as well (Hemmings, 2005). Hence it has been argued that affect theorists overstate the emancipatory and optimistic aspects of the concept - its highlighting of the rich texture of collective existence, or the transformative potential of intersubjective intensities - at the expense of ignoring the ways in which affects can be involved in less-than-desirable dynamics of power. Notwithstanding these critiques, as noted above some critical approaches to affect do point to its darker side, for example its integral role in anchoring people to states of subjection (Butler, 1997a, see also Harding and Lee, 2014; Stavrakakis, 2014), in binding them to consumerism (Bauman, 2007), or enticing subjects to damaging, albeit compelling, political ideologies like fundamentalism or fascism (Berlant, 2007; Hemmings, 2005). In other words, affect maintains and strengthens a problematic social order as much as it contains the potential for transforming it.

Last but not least, the feminist critique of affect points to the necessarily a-political implications of the idea of 'presubjective forces' that downplay peoples' lived experiences of, for example, gendered structures of domination. Even so, feminist scholars have been at the heart of theoretical engagements with affect, in part because for some, feminism itself is a politics 'suffused with feelings, passions and emotions' (Gorton, 2007: 333). In addition feminism has long recognized the critical links between affect and gendered, sexualized, racialized and classed relations of power (Pedwell and Whitehead, 2012). Hence feminists remind us that it is crucial for us as organizational scholars to reiterate affect as socially situated rather than as an individual and depoliticized state of being and experience.

Contributions to this special issue

Inspired by the developments discussed above, the overarching goal of our Special Issue was to make space for new critical, ethical and political perspectives on affect, organizations and

organizing. In so doing, we built upon a small but burgeoning body of work in which authors have engaged with these ideas in order to better understand organizational life (Beyes and Steyaert, 2013; Borch, 2010; Iedema et al., 2006; Fotaki et al., 2012; Kenny, 2012; Kenny et al., 2011; Vachhani, 2013; Thompson and Willmott, 2015). To this end we invited contributions that develop concepts of affect from a variety of perspectives in order to critically analyze organizations and organizing by providing fresh and even controversial insights. We were particularly keen to include contributions that emphasized the political and social implications of affect in organizations and organizing.

While the Call for Papers attracted a high number of submissions, we were able to accept only five articles, representing less than a quarter of the number of originally submitted contributions. Because of the somewhat dysfunctional nature of journal publishing, we were restricted in the time we could spend with each article. This meant that some contributions that were at very early stages of development when we received them, but that would have benefited from advice and careful development, had to be omitted. As editors, we focused on papers that, in addition to being topical, original and engaging with an important aspect of the Call, were also sufficiently advanced in their development to stand a chance of being published within the timescale agreed with the publisher. Given that we as editors of this Special Issue are socially situated trans-subjects who are affected in equal measure by pleasant and less pleasant events (we witnessed a total upheaval in a country that one of us has close links to but we also had the joy of welcoming two newborn girls during the process of preparing the issue), this has been a tough process for us. Nonetheless, we have been working with authors who did not make the final issue, in order to develop their promising work, and we hope to see these articles forthcoming in this or another journal.

Yet our satisfaction with the outcome of this Special Issue is true and profound. We are proud to be able to include the five excellent articles as each in its own right and all taken together make a substantive and original contribution to progressing theorizing on affect in organizations. Parisa Dashtipour and Benedicte Vidaillet's article opening this Special Issue brings in the importance of affect for understanding the nature of work and its centrality for constituting us as subjects. They draw upon Christophe Dejours, a psychologist of work and psychoanalyst who is all but unknown in organization studies, to distinguish between at least four separate but related ways in which work can be said to be central: affective suffering, the real of work, the significance of the body and 'ordinary sublimation'. Work is understood as

a collective endeavour: a source of being in the social and a means for self-expression. The key argument offered is that suffering occurs when the potentialities of work are obstructed. By reinterpreting Menzies' (1960) well-known hospital case study on nurses deploying defensive mechanisms to avoid experiencing work-related anxieties in light of the proposed framework, Dashtipour and Vidaillet illustrate how Dejours' theory extends existing psychoanalytical approaches by focusing on the role of the collective in supporting workers to work well. They conclude by proposing resistance strategies, aimed at reclaiming the creative potential of work through collective struggle for emancipation.

Karen Lee Ashcraft's article comes next and takes as its subject ordinary affect and precarious resistance in academic labour. The article employs an interestingly direct writing style to explore *The Rule of Excellence* and the neoliberal university. Ashcraft uses inhabited criticism, which helps us to come to terms with the affective demands and limitations of all modes of criticism and to enact an alternative posture of resistance rooted in 'sense-abilities'. Three tales of *The Rule of Excellence* are performed and Ashcraft demonstrates how affect theory animates this rule as an agentic current; one that "'moves" academic landscapes and figures in troubling yet indeterminate ways'. A combination of disembodied analysis, personal confession and dualistic dialogue enacts a critical practice that reveals affective postures. The affective disposition uncovered in this analysis teaches us why academics, even the critically inclined, tend not to resist. The paper deftly analyses ordinary resistance not to move beyond the ordinary but to search for the complexity within the ordinary. Ashcraft draws on recent work on new materialisms, drawing on work by Mol and Law, where social and material realities are staged together, and utilises Kathleen Stewart's post-dualistic conception of ordinary affects which are 'felt forces that are living and non-organic, non-human and human, at once public, widely circulated, and intimately encountered'. Thus, drawing on Stewart further, politics start in the animated inhabitation of things. For Ashcraft, criticism attuned to ordinary affects is not so much non-representational as it is 'more than representational', exceeding signification without entirely leaving it (Beyes and Steyaert, 2012). The article emerges as a foray into what such inhabited criticism can do, beyond functionalist inquiry or an interrogation of interests, how it renders the human vulnerable and how it can make a difference.

Timon Beyes and Christian De Cock's contribution focuses on colour, particularly the idea that colour-as-affect represents a powerful force in organizational life, for which they draw

on ideas from Deleuze and Massumi. As a phenomenon, colour is always in motion; it cannot be said to only reside in objects, or in mere personal experiences. It is both related to such specific contexts and situations but also independent of, and exceeding these; this surplus forms a thread that connects experiences. In this way colour can represent a potential freedom from constraint, a view that echoes dominant approaches to affect that see it as a potentially 'liberating force'. However, they note, in experiencing and thinking colour, we must also consider its relation to control. Inspired by Walter Benjamin, the authors describe how colour-as-affect operates immanently, momentarily posing a disruption and challenge, but always in an ambiguous and indeterminate way. Supporting these observations are two illustrations, the first an art installation by Hito Steyerl and the second taken from the writing of anthropologist Michael Taussig. The latter represents an inquiry into colour's organizational force: including the gruesome affective labour of indigo production in the colonies, and the Western fascination with, and repulsion by, the coloured colonial other. Overall, Beyes and De Cock challenge a persistent 'chromophobia' in Western life, in organization studies and in scholarship on affect. They argue that colour, through its 'critical ambiguity as both technology of organization and transformative force', offers ways of rethinking traditional organizational settings both in relation to control but also to critique.

The mundane and ordinary acquire a very different quality in the work of Christoph Michels and Chris Steyaert; where theories of affective atmospheres from philosophy and cultural geography are used to explore implications for organizational life. The article analyzes a performance of the music of Greek/French composer, Yiannis Xenakis in Berlin's public spaces. The author has an innovative style of presenting his work, as we also see in our concluding article by Pullen, Rhodes and Thanem, utilizing personal reflections and visual material in order to paint a picture of how a group of musicians planned, staged and re-organized a music event that took place over two days. They show how the event represents an intervention in the urban atmosphere of the city, instantly engaging random spectators in the performance and yielding affects through various inter-corporeal encounters. Again we see elements of the political charge of affect, this time through its transmission from the art of a composer and a leading intellectual (Xenakis), who, as a young man fought against Nazi armies in Greece as part of the Communist resistance. The composer was badly injured by a blast from a British tank at the end of the Second World War that horribly disfigured his face (he opted out of restorative surgery) and caused partial blindness. Thus, affect can be seen as emerging in complex ways when the ephemeral meets with history and remembering, and is

when it flows through encounters between humans and non-human factors that include sound, space and weather. Michels addresses an important question in debates on affect: whether it is possible to design and craft an affective atmosphere, or whether such a thing can only emerge in erratic and unplanned ways. He shows how the composition of affective atmospheres is necessarily fleeting and impossible to capture, but how the phenomenon can also highlight important aspects of living and being in organizations, not least where the politics of affect establishes affirmative possibilities and generativity.

Alison Pullen, Carl Rhodes and Torkild Thanem conclude our special issue by arguing for a greater focus on the body and its experiences in affect research. They engage with an affective politics underpinned by a relational ontology in order to move beyond the persistent binarism between culturally constructed emotions and the body's materiality, while focusing on the radical potential of mundane experiences in everyday organizational life. Echoing the call by feminist theorists, described above, to avoid a depoliticized analysis, this article foregrounds the critical potentialities of affective experiences particularly in relation to gendered organizational structures. It does so partly through the use of an innovative and evocative writing style in which personal experiences are juxtaposed with theoretically-inspired reflection. Moreover, the authors demonstrate how feminist theorists have made, and can continue to make, distinctive contributions to conceptualizing affective dynamics in organizations. They draw on Rosi Braidotti's reading of Deleuze and Guattari, whose work is inspired by Spinoza's philosophy of joyful existence, to invoke the affective trajectory of 'becoming-woman', a process of deterritorialization that extends beyond biological women and represents an important force for critique and potentially for change. This, the authors suggest, is because 'minoritarian politics' hold out hope that individual potentiality can be realized as an effective subversion of exploitative and oppressive regimes of power, including those of the gendered organization that concern them. Here, becoming is proposed as an open-ended process that is not in pursuit of the fixed or predefined positions that are privileged in dualist ontologies; it dispenses with an individualized, finite and separate notion of the subject. In adopting such a non-teleological position, the authors call for retheorizing subjectivity as always being in connection and in flux rather than in opposition to the other. This allows for an exploration of the radical potential in the everyday by asking the seemingly mundane question of what bodies can do, not least because of our openness to both the sad affects that the gendered organization generate in us and between us, and the joyful affective encounters that might challenge it. The article also makes us more sensitive to the

political implications of organization theories in which neither politics is privileged over embodiment, nor theoretical exposition favored over corporeal exploration.

Conclusion

In this Special Issue, we sought to build on extant scholarship on organizational affect theory, and to explore whether and how affect can provide new and fruitful lenses for the critical analysis of organizational life. Through the papers presented here, we see how affect can shed light on a vast array of experiences of work and organization, and on organizational research and writing. We propose that this special issue might have promise beyond the remit of organization studies. Beyond this discipline, scholars of affect have been accused of being among the most unfeeling of academics (Probyn, 2010), often providing abstract and disengaged accounts despite the clearly transsubjective and embodied nature of the concept itself. In light of this, we argue that organization studies stands to make an important contribution to affect theory. Critiques such as Probyn's are likely to relate to its heretofore development within disciplines such as cultural and literary studies. In contrast, organization studies is a necessarily more engaged discipline (as is feminist theory). An empirical construct, the organization, lies at the heart of all of its endeavors. The study of affect in such settings necessitates an engagement with subjects, bodies and experiences, as the articles in this Special Issue demonstrate so well. Indeed the papers we present here are anything but disengaged or apolitical, representing rich examples of what Lauren Berlant (2011) describes as 'ethical noticing', a state of awareness of the small details of life as it unfolds in diverse organizational contexts. We propose that this may lead to a new and fruitful direction for affect theory; workplaces of all kinds offer rich settings for engaging with the 'pulsing refrains of affect' that illuminate the organizational scenes we study, potentially yielding insights for affect theory more generally.

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