



The effect of affect: Desire and politics in modern organizations

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This open issue consists of a number of contributions, which at first glance do not seem to be linked by any particular theme. Examining the different approaches to *theory & politics in organization* that are taken by the eclectic collection of papers featured here, however, it appears that the theoretical notion of the *affective* emerges again and again, as central to the politics of organization. The notion of affect is as such nothing new to *ephemera*. Worth noticing is for example Clough et al.'s (2007) careful theorization of 'affect-itself', which was part of a special issue dedicated to exploring immaterial and affective labor (see Dowling et al. 2007). Also worth mentioning is the special issue on theory of the multitude (see Virtanen and Vähämäki 2004). The pieces in this issue therefore nicely pick up on an on-going debate in *ephemera* and illustrate, each in their own way, how an attentiveness to affect helps us to deepen our understanding of the ways in which organization and the political intertwine. This can be seen in relation to the micro-practices of organizations; to the compelling ideologies that inscribe our workplace lives; and to the methods adopted by organization studies scholars.

Inspired by the collection of papers, the panel discussion and the book reviews that appear in this issue, we next introduce and situate the notion of the affective. We do this largely through Judith Butler's discussion of desire and politics, an approach that appears to resonate with many of the articles that follow. We hope that this represents a questioning and exploration of 'the effect of affect' in contemporary organizations, even beyond this collection.

Desire for the political: The notion of affect

The notion of affect parallels different authors' investigations into the operation of power and discourse. For many, desire and affect necessarily inscribe the operation of the political (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Stavrakakis, 2008; Žižek, 1989). These approaches have, in turn, informed a number of organization studies (e.g. Bojesen and Muhr, 2008; Driver, 2005; Harding, 2007; Hoedemaekers, 2009; Kenny, 2010; Stavrakakis, 2008), in which desire is treated as an integral part of the ways in which powerful norms and discourses come to be reproduced.

In the wider realm of social theory, Judith Butler's work is noted as being one of the more rigorous and theoretically rich examples of this approach to studying power (Hall, 2000). She marries poststructuralist insights from Michel Foucault with Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalysis, to arrive at a concept of identification that is at once power-laden, social and affective in nature. This prominent poststructural philosopher's contributions to the areas of feminism, queer theory, political philosophy and ethics are widely recognised (Lloyd, 2007).

In relation to the question posed here, Butler begins with Foucault's account of how power/knowledge relations come to be reproduced in everyday life. For Foucault such networks of power tend to propagate a view of the world that becomes naturalized over time, and this is sustained by the repeated practices of subjects; discourses are upheld by their re-enactment in everyday life at the 'local level':

The rationality of power is characterized by tactics that are often quite explicit at the restricted level where they are inscribed (the local cynicism of power), tactics which, becoming connected to one another, attracting and propagating one another, but finding their base of support and their condition elsewhere, end by forming comprehensive systems. (Foucault 1990: 94-95)

Of course, this idea of Foucault's has informed thousands of studies within the organization sphere; critical management perspectives centred around understanding discourses of work and capital from a Foucauldian perspective for the past twenty years (see for example Knights and Willmott, 1989). For the purposes of our argument, we wish to point to one aspect of this account of normative reproduction; Foucault notes that each citation of a given norm contains within it the potential for its alteration, but in an unpredictable way: a conception he refers to as the *alea* (the Latin word for 'dice') or chance (Foucault, 1981). Thus, as we engage with particular social norms in daily life, our actions contain the potential for imperfect repetitions of these norms, leaving them open to subversion and the emergence of unintended consequences. The question that Foucault leaves unanswered, in his consideration of *alea*, is precisely how and why this happens at the level of the subject (Foucault, 1981). This question has troubled many Foucauldian scholars including Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982), who conjecture that his untimely death in 1984 might have prevented the philosopher himself continuing the project of explicating the ongoing 'techne (technique) of the self', a project he had begun with gusto in his later life (Foucault, 1991: 348).

Butler's early work represents an explicit engagement with this question, by posing it against a backdrop of psychoanalysis, feminist theory and linguistics (1990; 1993). She comes to regard the psyche as providing a useful missing link:

Foucault is notoriously taciturn on the topic of the psyche, but an account of subjection, it seems, must be traced in the turns of psychic life. (Butler, 1998: 18)

Thus she embarks upon developing such an account, exploring:

how the formation of the subject involves the regulatory formation of the psyche, including how we might rejoin the discourse of power with the discourse of psychoanalysis. (Butler, 1998: 18)

Specifically, Butler's Foucauldian/psychoanalytic examination of processes of identity in this work grounds its insights in the concept of *turning*. Turning has its antecedents

in the philosophy of Hegel and the psychoanalytic theory of Freud and Lacan. Butler conceives of it as:

the peculiar turning of a subject against itself that takes place in acts of self-reproach, conscience and melancholia that work in tandem with processes of social regulation. (Butler, 1998: 18-19)

There is an element of the unknown in this turning, an aspect that can neither be predicted nor explained (Butler, 1993: 122; 1998). It is this 'unknowingness', Butler conjectures, that enables power-knowledge relations to be re-enacted in ways that appear unpredictable and random: to yield the unintended consequences inherent in their reproduction. Central to this account of normative re-enactments are the concepts of recognition and affect. Embedded in these acts of 'self-reproach, conscience and melancholia' are processes of desire.

Drawing on Lacan among others, the notion that subjects require the address of the other for their constitution in social life is a recurrent feature of Butler's work (Lloyd, 1998). As does Lacan, Butler builds on the Hegelian claims that 'desire is always a desire for recognition' by others and that 'to persist in one's own being is only possible on the condition that we are engaged in receiving and offering recognition' (Butler, 2004: 31). Butler's contribution is to take a Foucauldian approach to this Hegelian argument. Firstly, we can only receive and offer recognition by *engaging with the norms* of recognition:

If there are no norms of recognition by which we are recognizable, then it is not possible to persist in one's own being, and we are not possible beings; we have been foreclosed from possibility. (Butler, 2004: 31)

Subjection to such norms of recognition is thus essential to our persistence as beings. This dependency on the recognition of others locates us 'outside of ourselves', in a 'broader sociality' and 'this dependency is the basis of our endurance and survivability' (2004: 32). As Butler observes, our fundamental need for recognition even causes us to subject ourselves to norms that could cause us injury:

Called by an injurious name, I come into social being, and because a certain narcissism takes hold of any term that confers existence, I am led to embrace the terms that injure me because they constitute me socially. (Butler, 1998: 104)

We are inescapably linked to those around us for acknowledgement (Hancock and Tyler, 2001; Roberts, 2005). Importantly, this shows the political nature of recognition: the way in which we feel compelled to identify with norms that may be injurious to ourselves or to those we care about. Central to this compulsion is the notion of affect. Spinoza's early influence on Butler's work contributed to her idea of the political importance of a passionate connection to others. In this work she finds that:

a conscious and persistent being responds to reflections of itself in emotional ways, according to whether that reflection signifies a diminution or augmentation of its own possibility of future persistence and life. (Butler, 2004: 235)

In *Undoing Gender* Butler draws these ideas together to develop the concept of a 'liveable life' (Butler, 2004). We fundamentally require the recognition of a symbolic Other, which manifests itself in the presence and discourses of others, in order to

survive as subjects. Intense feeling, be it love or its keenly felt absence, is thus central for Butler in understanding subjection to normative ways of knowing. In apprehending our relations with the world and with each other, we must, she argues, recognize the:

Passion and grief and rage (we feel), all of which tear us from ourselves, bind us to others, transport us, undo us, and implicate us in lives that are not our own, sometimes fatally, irreversibly. (Butler, 2004: 20)

For this reason, grief, rage and other powerful emotions are what inescapably link us to other people, to lives that are not our own. Butler's *passionate attachment* refers to her view that the passion by which we experience our embeddedness in other people makes us vulnerable to them, but likewise inescapably constituted by them. Through reading Lacan via Foucault and others, Butler's concept of passionate attachment is an explicitly political one; in addition to enabling our survival, this dependency we have on others also contributes to our own subordination. For these reasons, passionate attachment is inescapably ambivalent in its operation and must be viewed in the context of whatever power-laden matrix of discursive interests one finds oneself at a given juncture. For Butler, our inescapable, emotive dependence upon others forms a key aspect of the ways in which we subject ourselves to particular normative frameworks.

Desire, theory, politics and organization

Butler's critical, psychoanalytic perspective has lately helped authors understand the operation of the political within organizational settings (Driver, 2005; Harding, 2003; Hodgson, 2005; Kenny, 2009; Loacker and Muhr, 2009; Roberts, 2005). In a similar way, the centrality of desire and affect to the operation of power certainly accompanies the papers published in this open issue.

Sofia Laine describes activists from the *Free Hugs Campaign* at the World Social Forum in Belém who, through their practices, employ 'distinctive bodily techniques and styles' in order to occupy space in a conscious way, as part of transmitting their messages (243). In doing so, Laine firstly advocates a form of organization research methods that involves the researcher's 'feeling and learning' the people being studied, with her own body as well as through those around her. This implies a commitment to fully engaging with research participants, and draws attention to the affective nature of the research interaction. Such an embodied, 'passionate' engagement, if we deploy Butler's terms, will without doubt incorporate the problematic or harmful, as well as the joyous and rewarding. However, it may well yield a closer understanding of the particular context, political and otherwise, that pertains to research participants. Secondly, Laine demonstrates how new media such as video and digital methodologies can be deployed in studies that attempt to transmit the feeling of such 'passionate' engagement; conveying more deeply the phenomenon being researched.

For Alexander Styhre, a way of combining spoken language with literary techniques is needed among organization studies authors, something provided by French writer Celine's unique methods. Via Celine's 'three plains of engagement', Styhre proposes to free organization theory, making it more 'passionate, that is, an intense and expressive pursuit', approximating a 'post representational writing that reinstates pathos' (258).

Overall, his approach appeals to the affective experience of reading and writing organization. Moreover, the writer Celine explicitly avoids the temptation to make judgements on particular values or qualities that are being observed. Nor does he explain what he is seeing. Rather life is presented as it seems to sometimes appear: farcical and meaningless, blind to any social norms of behaviour or conduct. The 'affective effect' is one of dry and detached cynicism; standing back from the world as one sees it. What Styhre arrives at then, is a new literary style, or timbre within organization studies: one of cynicism and cool distancing. This affective stance has, for Styhre, political implications; he argues that too much is lost in searching for inner meanings in phenomenological approaches to studying the social sciences that are frequently adopted; detachment is preferred.

Oliver Mallett and Robert Wapshott address an empirical problem: the notion of how one works in an organization with which one disagrees. In this article, the idea posed above emerges: that processes of identification with power are infused with affective relations. How, wonder the authors, do people cope with the pain and confusion of being employed by a firm that is apparently doing disagreeable things, but which one cannot leave? In exploring the ways in which employees experience such 'self conflict' (271), they propose a narrative approach to identity in order to help make sense of peoples' experiences. To illustrate their theoretical contribution to debates within organization studies, one that draws on Ricoeur, the authors deploy film as a device that enables the writer to express 'dynamic, complex' processes of identity work. In short, the authors enable a more nuanced way of illustrating the pain and struggle inherent to conflicting work roles, and demonstrate the richness of the proposed theoretical approach.

For Sam Dallyn, the concept of ideological investment is key to the central arguments in his paper. He is concerned with the association between the concept of innovation and the ideology of financialization. Situating innovation as a financial 'buzzword' he invokes the excitement of a new discursive shift among people who use it, implying that there is something compelling about the spread of this phrase through the social, in particular in the government and university sectors upon which he focuses (289). We know from other authors that ideologies carry affective pulses (Stavrakakis, 2010; Glynn, 2010). Relatedly, in developing her approach to understanding the political, Butler draws on Althusser, the theorist that informs Dallyn's views on ideology. For Butler, psychoanalysis can help us to understanding exactly the moment of interpellation described by Althusser; what happens when the subject is called by power and 'turns around' in recognition. As Butler notes however, affective investments in powerful discourses can be negative, and Dallyn illustrates this with his account of how this pervasive buzzword 'masks' and ostensibly increases problematic 'processes of commercialisation and financialisation' (289). He invokes the pain of the financial crisis, arguing that this is a context that forces us into a moment of decision; we must rethink the content of the term innovation immediately, he argues, because its current links with the narrow pursuit of profit are, simply, contributing to an implosion of the capitalist system. Moreover, the affective timbre of Dallyn's appeal is clear, he concludes his piece by demanding transformation, now! Dallyn calls for a shift in our understanding of innovation, to one that emphasises the transformative nature of the

process. He argues that this might some day move us towards a form of innovation that incorporates social justice and equality.

Interestingly, this desire for change, and resulting demand for transformation, appears in the panel discussion included in this issue (308). In the course of the conversation, a former practitioner asks, 'what is now to be done'? She demands that the academics in front of her suggest some form of change: an emancipatory project. This desire for answers is evaded and rebutted by others throughout the discussion. Panelists argue that it is preferable and more helpful to reflect upon the issues than to demand answers now. This evasion of the impetus for change is interesting. In relation to Dallyn and the panelists, it is possible that the necessity for 'doing something' arises in the moment of crisis: the moment of no return. Perhaps in the context of the panel, this moment has not yet arrived, and so this desire is deemed irrelevant. More generally, the panel discussion centres on the issue of power and the body, and on how particular discursive forces act to compel people into the regulation of their physical selves. We hear how techniques of this nature increasingly draw upon the affective, and how responses to such techniques are often infused by desire. For example, the discussion begins with Torkild Thanem noting that the question, 'what might I hope for?' is a much more seductive point of departure for discussing Critical Health Care Management, than 'what ought I to do?' The former question resonates with Butler's dilemma of how to construct a viable account of oneself in a situation of limited self-knowledge (Butler, 2005). For her, the explicit ethical context of 'what might I hope for?' becomes a much more relevant question than impossible questions about 'what I ought to do'. In this way, notions of the affective and desire (for freedom, for improvement) underscore the tone of the discussion. This is seen again when panelists move on to debate more explicitly the increasing politicization of the body, for example in relation to whether obesity can be seen as a political matter.

In the first book review, Philip Roscoe reads Jones and Spicer's *Unmasking the Entrepreneur*. The theme of affect again emerges; psychoanalysis and Lacan's conception of desire are, among others, important frameworks for Jones and Spicer's project. Their analysis shares similarities with Dallyn's discussion of innovation as the new 'buzzword', a connection Dallyn himself makes in his paper. According to Roscoe, the authors 'set about producing a much needed critical account of the entrepreneur and its place in contemporary society' (319). Roscoe further writes that 'at the heart of their account lies an unspoken understanding that linguistic categories have a real and defining power over material outcomes. For Jones and Spicer, a reconstruction of the entrepreneurial enterprise must therefore come through a critique and rebuilding of the language that surrounds entrepreneurship' (322). This project has, Roscoe concludes, not come to its end with this book. More work and additional accounts are needed – from Jones and Spicer, but furthermore from the many perspectives on entrepreneurship that Roscoe opens up towards the end of his review. This must, he argues, occur before we can count on any transformation towards a more socially productive entrepreneurship, something many seem to be longing for.

Leon Tan gives an account of Brinkerhoff's *Digital Diasporas: Identity and Transnational Engagement* in the second book review. Brinkerhoff's study provides a great variety of cases convincingly describing how diaspora communities use Internet

technologies for social organizing. Also in this book, according to Tan, passion and desire are driving forces for change. He believes that transmitting feelings is a crucial part of the case descriptions, a point that parallels Laine's arguments (in this issue). Tan writes that Brinkerhoff 'attempts to capture not only the semantic content of online interactions between diasporans, but also their emotional reactions. Emotions are, after all, the basis for affective bonds that motivate families and communities to maintain and nurture ongoing connections across the Internet after separation from each other by migration across geopolitical borders' (325). Tan is convinced to some degree but returns several times to the general difficulty with social analysis, particularly with regard to processes of identification and social formations, something he feels could have been dealt with more thoroughly in the book.

Overall therefore, while we do not wish to force some sort of consistency across the contributions in this issue, it is interesting that the theme of affect and power appears to emerge as a common theme among them. Viewing the issue as a whole, perhaps we are reminded about the necessity of an attentiveness to affect in the study of the politics of organization, well expressed in the following quote from Butler's work:

We are, from the start, given over to an other: this makes us vulnerable to violence, but also to another range of touch, a range that includes the eradication of our being at the one end, and the physical support for our lives, at the other. (Butler, 2004: 23)

This excerpt encapsulates the primacy of affect in Butler's account of subjection to norms. We are given over to those around us such that other people are, fundamentally, the undoing of us, and simultaneously the making of us.

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