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Abstract

We introduce and develop the concept of ‘affective arrangement’. It is a concept that can help consolidate a non-subjective, relational understanding of affectivity as proposed by some strands of work in cultural studies and continental philosophy in the Spinoza-Deleuze tradition. The concept works as an analytical tool to flesh out how affect unfolds dynamically and often unpredictably in a relational setting, while it is yet modulated in recurring and structured ways. We will show that the concept might be put to work both in interpretive and empirical work on affect and emotion. With this orientation, this paper contributes to the interdisciplinary study of situated affectivity and to the theoretical and conceptual unification of distinct strands of research from several disciplines.

KEYWORDS: Affect, Affective Arrangement, Assemblage, Deleuze, Emotion, Relationality

Introduction

This paper proposes to introduce the working concept of an ‘affective arrangement’ to the philosophical and interdisciplinary study of affect and emotion. This concept is a concretization of the notion of *affective relationality*. ‘Affective relationality’ expresses the idea – prevalent especially in the emerging field of cultural affect studies – that affect is not a matter of individual mental states but of interactive dynamics between individuals in a setting. On the one hand, it is relatively easy to come up with pre-theoretical examples of instances of affective relationality – such as in infant-caregiver interaction, in situations of engaged dialogue, in quarrels or arguments, in crowd behavior such as protests or riots, or in the immersive practices of interactive media. Yet, on the other hand, it is difficult to theoretically grasp the exact modes of relatedness in a concrete environment, the specific triggers and conduits, the situational framings and settings of these scenes of mutual affecting and being affected. This is where the concept of affective arrangement enters: Affective arrangements are situated, heterogeneous ensembles of humans and non-humans, materials, things, artifacts, spaces, discourses, behaviors and expressions, facilitating a concrete micro-analysis of affective relationality. The concept of an affective arrangement is an analytical tool to flesh out how affect unfolds dynamically and often unpredictably in a relational setting, while it is yet framed and modulated in recurring and structured ways.

1. Primer on affective relationality

To set the stage, some clarification on the relevant understanding of affect and on affective relationality is in order. Broadly in line with the ‘turn to affect’ in cultural

studies (see. e.g., Gregg & Seigworth 2010), the present proposal starts from a dynamic, non-categorical and relational understanding of affect that aligns with the philosophical tradition of Baruch Spinoza – an intellectual lineage that includes Nietzsche, Bergson, Whitehead, Simondon, Deleuze and Guattari among others.¹ In this process-ontological perspective, affect is construed as always and necessarily relational. Affect – which must always be read as: *dynamic relations of affecting and being affected* – is what perpetually unfolds between bodies or entities in general; it is not restricted to humans or animals, let alone to mental states of individuals. Affect, in this perspective, is an ontological principle: Entities do not take on certain affections as their “states”, but their being *is* affecting and being affected in relations. In its dynamical unfolding, affect is a forceful and potentially transformative relation, forming ‘processes of becoming’. In these relational processes, as Spinoza put it in his *Ethics*, the *powers* or capacities of the entities in question – their capacities for affecting and being affected – are either enhanced or diminished (1985 [1677]).²

When it comes to the human individual, relational affective dynamics are accordingly assumed to be a fundamental factor in ontogenesis and subjectivation, in the sense that affective relationality is prior to and partly constitutive of individual actors.

This processual perspective, owing in part to Gilbert Simondon’s (2007, 2009) philosophical groundwork on the notions of individuation and ontogenesis, is also labeled

1 This philosophical background is of course highly complex and multi-faceted, and notably thoroughly metaphysical as it includes the choice of a process-ontological instead
 2 See Kwek (2014) for a concise reconstruction of Spinoza’s conception of power as the capacity to affect and being affected. Notably, Kwek puts much emphasis on the aspect of receptivity or sensitivity (*..being affected*), so that it becomes clear that the potentialities of bodies – in the sense of power (*potentia*) – at issue always include their agentive and their receptive capacities. See also Balibar (1997), Gatens & Lloyd (1999) and especially the Deleuze branch in the Spinoza reception, Deleuze 1988, 1992).

‘transindividual’, as it focuses on relational processes of becoming and not on their anthropomorphic ‘end products’, i.e. constituted human subjects (cf. Balibar 1997; Scott 2014). While the details of such processes of ontogenesis are not central for the present considerations, the perspective adopted here mandates that affect is not initially identified with ‘affective states’ (feelings or emotions) of individuals. Instead, ‘affect’ refers to relational dynamics often passing by, exceeding or transgressing individual experience in various ways – intensive *intra-actions*, to use Karen Barad’s helpful term (2003).

Among other things, this understanding implies that affect is significantly different from emotions as conventionally understood and researched. The present proposal contrasts with the study of individuals’ emotions taken to be discrete, categorically circumscribed ‘felt episodes’ with intentional and evaluative content. Still, this contrast between affect (as pre-categorical dynamics between bodies) and emotion (as conceptually framed and ordered ‘states’ of persons) does not mark an absolute distinction. Emotion episodes are themselves specific affective dynamics, temporarily stabilized by certain patterns of reflection and narration, and tend to transform in various ways, change in intensity or dissolve entirely. On the other hand, initially nameless and potentially ‘unruly’ relational affect often consolidates into patterns and dynamic constellations, *some of which* instantiate culturally prevalent emotion types.³

³ There are some parallels between this neo-Spinozist understanding of affect and some strands of work in sociology. On the one hand, the sociology of emotion has long been a productive field of study in which the social shaping and patterning of emotions and emotional practices takes pride of place (see, e.g., Greco & Stenner 2008). On the other hand, ‘relationality’ itself figures prominently in recent sociological work, albeit in a less ontologically demanding understanding than in the Spinoza-Simondon lineage. ‘Relational sociology’ does not assume individuals to be *constituted in relation*. Instead, it takes *social reality* to consist in networks of relations which accordingly should be the prime objects of study in sociological research. Among the typical relations that are

The question whether affect is ‘structured’ or ‘unstructured’ is not an all-out affair. It is in part a matter of perspective – including a *temporal* perspective – of whether one assumes affect to be an ongoing dynamic, evolving processuality mostly bereft of structure or whether one views it as transiently patterned and modulated. To put it differently: what *is* ‘structured’ in the realm of affect changes dynamically over time, while, conversely, what might appear ‘unstructured’ at a given time will likely tend to consolidate into patterns or ‘affect blocs’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, ch. 7) – albeit in transient, fleeting, temporary ways. An approach to affect needs to allow for this primacy of movement and change, for dynamic framing and re-framing, temporary consolidation, ongoing transformation and eventual dissolution. Accordingly, conventional emotion categories – such as anger, fear, grief, pride, envy, etc. – are ill-suited to express the essentials of an instance of affect, although it *might* be the case, occasionally, that a dynamic sequence of relational affect runs along the pre-established lines of such an established category. It would be misleading to say affect is the ‘raw material’ of emotion (as nothing is ‘raw’ in this vicinity), but one might consider emotion episodes to be among the recurring constellations into which relational affect *might* cluster temporarily.⁴

This, then, is the aim of the following considerations: to develop conceptual tools that help to better grasp the processual unfolding and local modulation of affect –

studied are forms of social interaction, communication, media-established networks and so on. See, e.g., Crossley (2012), Fuhse (2015).

⁴ Accordingly, emotions themselves might be analyzed as ‘affective arrangements’ in the sense outlined in this paper. Cultures provide templates in which affect unfolds in regular ways, and *some of these templates* are the common emotion types attributed to individuals – for instance, shared and accepted ways in which grief, happiness, fear or anger are expressed and acted out in a specific locale (see Parkinson 1995, ch. 8, for a social psychological perspective on emotion as aspects of institutionally pre-structured social role behavior).

concepts that enable researchers to think the dynamic formations of relational affect while keeping difference, variance and deviation in play as crucial features of concrete scenes and sequences in which affect looms large.

2. Affective Arrangement – basic characterization

An affective arrangement is a material-discursive formation as part of which affect is patterned, channeled and modulated in recurrent and repeatable ways. Such arrangements usually bring multiple actors into a dynamic conjunction, so that these actors' mutual affecting and being-affected becomes a vital part of the arrangement itself. An affective arrangement could be, for instance, a specific work environment, from an ordinary office to a stock market trading floor, a subcultural niche, an event space such as a concert hall or sport site, a protest movement on a public square, various public sites of interaction such as in public transportation, streets, commercial environments, interaction with administration and bureaucracy, online platforms and social media user interfaces, even ceremonial regimes such as Christmas or a funeral. As a heterogeneous ensemble of various elements, an affective arrangement provides a kind of 'operational space' for affective interactions, yet the specific composition and modes of operation of the arrangement often evade attention and are not always easy to pinpoint.

As a regular feature from the perspective of the individuals involved, affective arrangements present opportunities for attachment. Often, individuals have an immediate incentive to enter into and stay within the constellation. It may have "stabilizing" effects on individuals to be framed within the arrangement's specific relations of affecting and being affected, and this stabilization may give rise to an ongoing attachment, even if this

might have negative effects on a person in the longer run (cf. Berlant 2012). From the general vantage point of social theory, affective arrangements are concrete sites demarcated from their surroundings by the regular occurrence of intensive affect unfolding in an at least minimally structured manner – affect-intensive domains, in short.

The concept of ‘affective arrangement’ is in part inspired by what Deleuze and Guattari have variously called ‘desiring machine’, ‘machinic assemblage’ or *agencement* in French (see esp. Deleuze & Guattari 1986, ch. 9; Deleuze 1988, ch. 2; Deleuze & Guattari 2004, ch. 15).⁵ Likewise, there are important links to Foucault’s notion of a ‘dispositif’, describing heterogeneous complexes of institutions, practices, knowledges, power and subjectivity as historical constellations (see most pointedly Foucault 1980).⁶

Part of what makes the concept of ‘affective arrangement’ productive for the study of affect is that it discloses what is dynamic, processual and potentially fleeting exactly in terms of certain *regular* configurations. The semantics of ‘*arrangement*’

5 The relationship between our proposal and Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of *agencement* is not simple. On the one hand, we intend our concept to be broader than the concept of *agencement* or machinic assemblage, so it can function as a medium-range working concept for quite different endeavors within the interdisciplinary study of affect and emotion. On the other hand, we aim to integrate a number of specific aspects from Deleuze and Guattari’s elaborations, as we see many points at which even their more extravagant ideas can inform a conceptualization with broad application. In a helpful paper, Ian Buchanan (2015) discusses some pitfalls that borrowings from Deleuze and Guattari have to confront, most notably those by proponents of Actor-Network-Theory or assemblage theory in the social sciences.

6 The term *dispositif* has been adapted to affect theory contexts as ‘*affectif*’ (Seyfert 2012). According to Robert Seyfert, the *affectif* is “the entirety of all heterogeneous bodies involved in the emergence of an affect” (2012, p. 31) – “an assemblage of heterogeneous elements (...) [including] the nature of the connection that can exist between these (...) elements” (p. 33). Besides sounding somewhat artificial, the term ‘*affectif*’ is in our view less semantically versatile and at the same time less precise than ‘affective arrangement’, as its connotations suggest a static constellation of elements, not the dynamics, plasticity and varied modes of participant involvement that ‘arrangement’ evokes. Apart from this terminological discordance, our proposal aligns with Seyfert’s in several respects.

invokes both, a minimally regular composition of elements, but also plasticity, modifiability, potential for improvisation and individual accommodation. This gets expressed in verbs such as ‘re-arrange’, and also ‘*s’arranger*’ in French or ‘*sich arrangieren mit...*’ in German. Modifications such as ‘to derange’ (*déranger / derangiert*), on the other hand, indicate possibilities of disorderly transformation, awkwardness or partial breakdown. The idea behind this choice of term is to seek relational affect in constellations which – despite the dynamic, transformative processuality of affect in general – display at least *some* level of regularity, at least some of the time, though not in the form of static, monolithic or conventionally ‘ordered’ complexes. An affective arrangement is a situational and transformative patterning of relational dynamics that co-depends on variable forms of participant involvement. With a concept like this, the vexing task of thinking instances of relative order in a world of perpetual flux might become more manageable.

3. Initial Examples and example domains

Urban planning or architecture in general is a good initial example domain for the “art of arranging affect”, as it not only provides infrastructure for traffic and commerce within an urban space, but also forms locally unique material-discursive configurations of routes, blockades, places and space. In many cases, these configurations have been purposefully set up in order to link a number of actors so that recurrent patterns of relational affect are enabled and sustained, while other potential patterns are averted or

rendered unlikely. Besides by purposeful design, affective arrangements also originate in more contingent ways, for example when a part or features of a landscape or unintended architectural constellations become focal points of recurring affective interactions, perhaps as a result of novel and previously unanticipated user practices (see, e.g., de Certeau 1984).⁷

In general, the concept of an affective arrangement refers to the specific local constellation of features and devices that mark moments of triggering, channeling, stabilizing, amplifying or re-directing instances of affective relatedness. Roughly, it encompasses all those features or elements in a local setting whose absence or modification would result in significantly different affective dynamics in that setting. Such arrangements can be either temporary and transient or become part of a more permanent structure, as might be the case with sport stadiums or sacred places.⁸ When a theatre performance, for example, engenders immersive resonance experiences, enacted relationally between the audience and the actors on stage, it is in large part thanks to the various items and techniques it encompasses in a specific dynamic formation that this happens and that the episode unfolds in quite these specific ways. In order to better understand the specifics of instances of relational affect in a particular setting and the

⁷ Various in-between origination scenarios have to be reckoned with, e.g. existing constellations or landmarks might be exapted for novel uses, become focal in new practices, gain unexpected strategic relevance for newly emerging groups, etc. Planned set-up and complete happenstance are just the radical poles in a broad spectrum of origination scenarios for affective arrangements.

⁸ Likewise, one might tentatively distinguish mundane or 'everyday' affective arrangements (such as those in offices, school classes or street corners) from 'ritualistic' ones, i.e. those that are particularly salient in terms of their affective intensity (art performances, sports events, parties etc.).

different subject positions it sets up, it is vital to analyze in detail the components, modes of composition and process routines of the respective arrangement.

There are many exemplary domains where affective arrangements play important roles: Take the material propping, staging, and scripting of rituals (such as those of religious worship), the material design and networked functionality of social media or interactive games, or the architectural layout and technological equipment of workplaces such as corporate offices. Likewise, many public places, e.g. libraries, concert halls, football stadiums or churches employ architecture, design and other material items to the effect that characteristic sequences of collectively co-produced affect are reliably realized in them. These arrangements usually work such that the enacted and expressed affectivity of the library users, football fans, concert-goers or religious worshippers become focal elements in the respective arrangement. For example, the coordinated cheering of football fans but also the focused silence of concert-goers are vital aspects of the affect-generating set up of professional football games or concert performances. Frequently, these affect-involving feedback loops work through recurring forms of temporal coordination, distribution and dissemination – such as rhythmic patterning – of individual affective and expressive displays. Affective arrangements bundle, crystallize, intensify instances of affect, combining initially individualized or micro-relational affect into larger relational constellations, some of which might then be experienced by participants holistically in the form of pervasive atmospheres or give rise to collective emotions, such as, for example, mass euphoria, collective anger or fear. Something comparable is true even of the private spaces of the family, which not only constellates furniture and items of

decoration in order to kindle and sustain certain atmospheres, affect tones or emotional climates but which usually assigns characteristic affective roles or ‘subject positions’ to the individual family members – often in ways that include moments of tension, recurring disharmony or outright oddities that all coalesce into a unique affective formation.

We make moderate use here of the notion of an ‘affective atmosphere’ (and related concepts), in order to highlight the gripping, forceful and holistically qualitative character of some forms of locally arranged affect from the participants’ experiential perspective (cf. Anderson 2009; and Seyfert 2012 & 2014 for critique). Tentatively, one might say that an affective atmosphere is what emerges, in some cases, from the coordinated ensemble of materials, spaces, tools, recurring behaviors, expressions, movements etc. which make up the arrangement in question. In contrast to this, the concept of an affective arrangement is less metaphorical, less prone to deterministic and homogenizing tendencies and potentially more explanatory as it points to a complex interplay of a variety of contributory elements and their concrete modes of composition.

4. The question of agency

Deleuze and Guattari’s choice of the term ‘agencement’ highlights another aspect that is important to an understanding of affective arrangements, as the etymological roots of *agencement* point toward the notion of *agency* (see, e.g., Deleuze & Guattari 1986, ch. 9). An *agencement*, in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense, is a constellation of heterogeneous elements that jointly implement an agentive routine. Likewise, affective arrangements are not simply organized compositions or ensembles of components that somehow ‘happen’ to evoke, organize and enable instances of relational affect. Rather, in many of the

arrangements in question the components are brought together in such a way that some agentive routine is actively run through – not in a mechanical fashion but with leeway for variation, disruptions, extensions, new connections, etc. In this sense, then, an affective arrangement is a matter of agency – affect and agency are closely knitted together in it. Obviously, given the distributed nature of an arrangement’s composition of elements, it cannot be just the intentional agency of individual actors, although it is clear that individuals’ acts and expressions often play important contributing roles. An affective arrangement enables, stages and intensifies forms of collective or distributed activity: it implements a circumscribed range of agentive operations that are differentially reproduced over time.⁹

A useful way to elaborate on the agentive nature of affective arrangements is to analyze them as *performative*. The distributed activity in question consists in repeated performances that answer to immanent norms of adequate execution, where the content of these norms – which might be quite specific, local and idiosyncratic – is itself subject to contestation and eventual revision or reform. Of course, insofar as it is indeed an *affective* arrangement, the immanent norms may simply revolve around the ‘successful’ (locally viable, productive etc.) realization or stabilization of certain forms of distributed affect. In general, an affective arrangement is essentially a dynamic, iterative pattern of norm-governed activity that centrally includes the affectivity and affective relatedness of various individuals.¹⁰

9 One might argue that affective arrangements combine human and material agency in complex entanglement, forming a “mangle of practice”, to use a term that Andy Pickering employed in his analysis of scientific practices (Pickering 1995).

10 This ‘posthumanist’ notion of performativity, which does not restrict the range of this concept to *human* acts, and the open-ended normativity involved in it, is developed by

From a broader vantage point, these points about agency and performativity shed some light on the relationship between the present proposal and work in recent praxeological or practice-theoretical strands of emotion and affect theory. Several authors have in recent years tried to illuminate the social and situational complexity of affect and emotion by drawing on the concept of practice and on the conceptual space surrounding it (e.g., Scheer 2012 with a focus on emotion; Wetherell 2012 with a critical focus on affect). While these proposals share important points in common with our approach, the idea of affective arrangements is more inclusive as to the contributing elements of agentive assemblages, less restricted to human activities as conventionally understood, and also – as we outline below – less orientated toward ‘clean’, linear and rational (i.e. ‘classically humanistic’) orderings of reality than most work in practice theory. While some affective arrangements may indeed be favorably compared to practices or practical assemblages in the sense countenanced by practice theory, many other affective arrangements exceed this predominantly anthropomorphic frame.¹¹

5. Distributed intentionality

Barad (2003) and explicated by Rouse (2002), ch. 7 & 8, whose work is also a good source on the relevant sense of “normativity” that we refer to here.

¹¹ A closer affiliation of the present proposal is with Actor-Network-Theory (ANT). Our account shares the focus on the concrete aggregates of entities and factors that make up reality, without recourse to pre-defined monolithic realms such as ‘the social’, ‘the material’ or ‘the biological’ (cf. Latour 2005). The most important difference is that ANT remains comparatively neutral as to the concrete forms of interactions and modes of association between the ‘actants’ that make up the networks under study, whereas the present proposal can specify with precision the various modes of relatedness in terms of affectivity (cf. Seyfert 2014). Likewise, the present account shares some aspects of its orientation with the field of ‘assemblage theory’ (DeLanda 2006), but not its flatly aggregative understanding of ‘assemblage’ (see Buchanan 2015 for critique of DeLanda’s approach).

Sometimes, it seems as if the kindling and sustaining of certain forms of intensive affect is the ‘primary purpose’ of an affective arrangement – for example, in events of mass entertainment such as parties, parades, carnivals, etc. On other occasions, the affective arrangement seems to have been set up for other purposes, for example for increasing the productivity of a team of employees – e.g., workplace affective arrangements, such as desk sharing spaces, interactive software, productivity apps etc. –, or bringing consumers to desire and eventually buy more products, as is the case with the layout of shopping malls with their decoration, ad boards, smiling personnel, background music etc. The putative ‘purpose’ of an affective arrangement might also change over time, as it might generate variation from within or align in new ways with other arrangements in other affect-intensive domains.

This opens up important questions as to the intentionality within or behind affective arrangements and as to whether arrangement and intentionality always coincide. If affective arrangements are manifestly ‘strategic’ or ‘purposeful’, whose strategies or purposes are these? While these points can be settled with precision only in the form of detailed case studies of concrete arrangements, a general tendency is becoming evident right away: Larger socio-cultural formations like economic systems, political institutions or technological arrangements can enact or otherwise implement intentions that are not the intentions of any of the individuals involved. Yet they often begin to work in secret complicity with the intentions, desires, fears or wishes of said individuals, rendering the question of who is acting on whose behalf and with what purposes in many cases intractable. In a similar way to that known from Foucault’s analyses of dispositifs of power, this is a ‘structural’, ‘non-subjective’ and pluralized intentionality that is

implemented in a distributed manner, rather than instantiated in individual agents (cf. Foucault 1998; cf. Agamben 2009). In this perspective, it will often be the presumed individual intentions that are explicated with recourse to the arrangements in which the individuals are constitutively enmeshed. In fact, however, the situation is more complicated as individuals often key into the arrangements with their own strategic aims and purposes, as indicated above (cf. de Certeau 1984). It is not unusual that individuals might quite purposefully and with much tactical and reflective insight make use of a given affective arrangement in order to enhance and intensify their feelings, connect with other people or use the arrangement to pursue all kinds of other aims.

In a significant number of cases, affective arrangements lure individuals into their positions by providing opportunities for attachment. For example: It feels good to be a spectator at a play or a football game, sitting in an audience can have a mesmerizing effect that captures attention and freezes one temporarily in one's place, immersive experiences such as in gaming or in the use of social media are often inherently pleasurable. Likewise, taking part in an interaction ritual is an intensive experience that is often actively sought-out and engaged in for its own sake (cf. Collins 2004). This notable affective attraction, their character as 'pleasure centers' or local 'affect intensifiers' is part of what gives affective arrangements their salience as focal points of social and cultural life.

This outward salience and attraction must not be confused with structural transparency. Beyond the superficial allure that draws individuals (in selective ways) into the arrangement, an affective arrangement's overall organization and strategy is usually

much more complex and might remain largely opaque. Relatedly, one must not underestimate the complexity and the individual idiosyncrasies that attachments within affective arrangements might encompass. Individuals attach in all sorts of ways, including ways that seem to bring more pain than pleasure. For example, Lauren Berlant's work on "cruel optimism" presents instances of profound, even identity-constituting attachments to arrangements whose operations can over time be quite detrimental to the well-being or flourishing of the individuals that engage in them, even in face of substantial reflexive insight into these matters (see Berlant 2012).

6. Strange compositions

In part for the reasons just outlined, the focus on 'purposes', 'intentions' or 'strategies', while important, risks to mold affective arrangements in a too linearly rational direction. This orientation should accordingly be counterbalanced, which might be done by elaborating upon another central feature of affective arrangements. In fact, as Deleuze and Guattari have stressed repeatedly, 'machinic assemblages' are usually not smoothly functioning, literally 'well-oiled' machines, but rather cranky, deranged, partly out-of-joints, in one word: *strange* compositions (Deleuze & Guattari 1986, ch. 9).¹² They often are the result of tinkering, dreaming, deliria, pathological processes, historical drift or accidental encounters. This crankiness is part of their affect-generating potency, and it

12 For lack of space we cannot do justice here to the full theoretical background of Deleuze's and Guattari's concept of an *agencement machinique* and related notions. Besides the paper by Buchanan (2015) already mentioned, we have found illuminating philosophical and historical remarks in the work of media theorist Erich Hörl, who connects the concept back to Simondon's work on individuation and technical objects; see, e.g., Hörl (2011, *Introduction*).

might also in part account for their robustness, i.e. the arrangements' capacity to absorb or accommodate mishaps and accidents.¹³

In a related context, Ian Buchanan has pointed out that Freud's concept of a 'Komplex' (as in 'Oedipal complex' or 'castration complex') is a crucial terminological precursor of Deleuze and Guattari's term 'agencement' (Buchanan 2015, p. 383). Conditions resembling Freudian 'complexes' are often played out as idiosyncratic 'lived arrangements' that might include fetishes, tics, or other extravagant components. In elaborating the concept of an affective arrangement, theorists and researchers must reckon with such local antics and idiosyncrasies (see also Guattari 1995). It is part of the descriptive power and scholarly excitement of cultural affect studies that it actively seeks out constellations in which affect is 'machinated' in unruly, surprising, sometimes manifestly crazy ways – by arrangements or 'local machines' whose characteristic might be that they don't quite work in previously intended ways (cf. Buchanan 2015, p. 384). Obviously, this imposes further limits on the degree and reach of theoretical elaboration – it is mandatory that affective arrangements be specified locally, grounded in the observation of concrete affect-intensive sites and domains. This also puts limits on the helpfulness of concepts from practice theory (e.g., agency, practice, performativity, normativity, field, habitus, etc.), as these terms are often employed with a tendency to foreground structured, meaningful, even conventionally rational articulation and relatively stable strategic constellations. While no doubt useful, these notions are at risk

13 That this is true of machines in general, if properly understood, is part of the message of Simondon's work on the ways of being of technical objects. According to Simondon, the 'open machine' that has leeway for integrating novelty possesses a higher degree of technicity than the closed system of a fully automated machine (see Simondon 1989).

to become conceptual ‘straightening tools’ and thus must be employed with caution to prevent local specificities being blocked from view.

7. Multi-track Historicity

This potential ‘messiness’ helps direct attention to another important dimension of affective arrangements: their multi-track historicity. Affective arrangements are usually not formed ad hoc, but they emerge out of multiple formative trajectories, e.g. histories of fine-tuning, of combining and re-combining of components, of accommodation to various forms of resistance or failure, histories of reform, of expansion, of transformation, but also sheer historical accident. The components of an arrangement follow their own specific developmental trajectories – including the historical developments of various registers of forms, modes of expression, regimes of signification or artistic genres – but the arrangement itself has likewise a history, or rather: multiple strands of becoming.¹⁴ Accordingly, affective arrangements might be cautiously considered as ‘conservation devices’ in which histories of interaction and of collective habituation have become sedimented, so that the ongoing affectedness that transpires within the arrangement is a differential reenactment of past processes.¹⁵

This complex, multi-track historicity obviously includes the (in itself multi-dimensional) habituation of the participating individuals according to the affective requirements and possibilities of an established arrangement. For example, theater-goers

¹⁴ Again, Simondon is an important source on this conception of historicity, particularly his work on technical objects (Simondon 1989). His distinction between *elements*, *individuals* and *ensembles* can aid in breaking down the different strands of becoming that come together in an affective arrangement.

¹⁵ This links back to the point about the performativity of affective arrangements made in section 5 above.

or football fans but also consumers have to deal with various requirements to express and enact affectivity in line with the demands and local specificities of the affective arrangements they enter into.

We are highlighting the historicity here also because the initial design of our proposal might suggest a synchronic orientation, as the focus is on what unfolds *presently*, in ‘live’ scenes of affective relationality. An affective arrangement as such, considered in full, is ‘always on’, so to speak (it is *energeia*, not *dynamis*). But while it is true that an affective arrangement is impossible without ongoing processes of affecting and being affected, this does not preclude but rather *entails* a complex temporality. The momentary unfolding of a scene of relational affect is a process of becoming, that is, a temporal sequence in which past, present and future are complexly entwined. Accordingly, even the study of *present* affective dynamics within an arrangement is inevitably also a ‘bringing to live’ of a sedimented past, as this ongoing formative history is ‘activated’ or ‘called-up’ in the scene at hand.¹⁶

At some remove from this focus on the liveness of an affective arrangement, the constellations in question might also be broken up into their elements for purposes of analysis. In this perspective, it makes sense to focus selectively on the different formative histories of various contributing elements of an arrangement. For example, one might study the history of a certain style of architecture in order to better understand how exactly it is implicated in present-day affective dynamics in a specific urban setting.

¹⁶ Henri Bergson, on whom Deleuze and Guattari draw extensively, and also Heidegger are important authors in this regard. See Slaby (2015) for an interpretation of the entanglement of temporality and affectivity in Heidegger.

8. Individual affective dispositions

The point about the multi-track historicity raises the important issue of individual involvement. How exactly, and by virtue of what characteristics and abilities do individuals become (and remain) ‘part of’ affective arrangements? Importantly, individuals enter into arrangements with their own specific *affective dispositions*, i.e. with their individual capacity to affect and be affected in concrete ways. In line with the relational understanding of affect, these affective dispositions should be understood as the sedimented remainders of a person’s prior history of being-in-relation (see Mühlhoff 2015). Accordingly, these dispositions will likely share central characteristics with interpersonal affective arrangements, i.e. their partly accidental, idiosyncratic (and thus not entirely predictable) character.¹⁷

Despite this potential uniqueness, an individual repertoire of ‘affective relatability’ must be at least minimally compatible with a social domain’s affective arrangements for the individual to be able to figure in the arrangement in adequate ways (i.e. in ways that are ‘pleasure-generating’, ‘productive’, ‘locally meaningful’, or some such). In cases of gross discordance or misfit, the agent is either incapable of any affective involvement whatsoever – thereby, in some cases, putting the arrangement itself on the brink of breakdown – or will react with feelings of dissonance and displeasure upon coming close to the constellation in question.

Relatedly, it can frequently be observed that individuals develop their own ‘working arrangements’ in order to better cope with the demands of socially prevalent

¹⁷ Wetherell (2012, esp. ch. 7), in her effort to deflate the hype around cultural affect studies, has much to say about individually sedimented relational repertoires of affect or affectability; her view converges with ours in some relevant respects.

affective arrangements (cf. Buchanan 2015, 383). This adds a more active component to the picture, as individuals indeed ‘arrange’ their immediate surroundings intentionally in response to an affective arrangement already in place. For example, if a workplace has a harsh culture of pressuring, measuring and evaluating employees and publicly shaming those that perform poorly, individuals might cultivate their own ‘protective arrangements’ in order to still be able to thrive in that environment – for example, by setting up their office or cubicle space in accommodating ways or by seeking the company of friendly colleagues during breaks. Families are another case in point, just think of kids’ or adolescents’ many ways of navigating around parental demands. These individual ‘working arrangements’ slot into the overall affective arrangements in specific ways (cf. Ahmed 2006, p. 10-11 on affective place-making). This points to a nested structure of interlocking arrangements, from individual dispositions and coping patterns via various micro- and meso-scale assemblages all the way up to larger cultural formations and even entire affective or emotional cultures at large. Though nested, these interrelations will rarely be linear, rational and predictable, but rather specific, varied and subject to frequent change.

9. Outlook

Our exposition of the concept ‘affective arrangement’ has implicitly combined two rather distinct methodological orientations. Taken in its full complexity, ‘affective arrangement’ is a philosophical concept that aims at bringing out the *unique* constellation of a particular affect-intensive site of social life. It drives toward disclosing the operative essentials of a given domain in terms of local ‘machinations’ of relational affect. In this,

the concept works somewhat like a diagnostic category in an endeavor that resembles ‘personalized medicine’ – albeit not for afflicted individuals but for segments of public life. The methodology associated with this employment of the concept is a qualitative, interpretive and also a constructive procedure at some remove from empirical investigation of social domains. Philosophy and cultural studies, in this emphatic sense, are not ‘underlaborers’ assisting other, allegedly more empirical undertakings, but activities *sui generis* in pursuit of disclosing and articulating reality.¹⁸

On the other hand, much in the foregoing has pointed to aspects of potential empirical research methodologies. For instance, social scientists, ethnographers or researchers of media who approach a social domain might use ‘affective arrangement’ as an explorative concept that guides their initial charting of the material layout and functional design of social spaces, domains or media platforms, focusing on those elements and their structured interplay that are presumably instrumental to the reliable production and/or continued circulation of affect. For example, the ethnographic study of ritual might map out elements of the material propping and staging instrumental to the unfolding of affect during the ritualistic performances. In the sociology of organizations, the design of offices and workplaces might be approached with an eye to those factors and arrangements which likely play a role in realizing the predominant forms of affective interactions or affective atmospheres in these settings. Even the study of individual experience by means of qualitative interviews can make use of the concept, as interviewees might be asked about salient elements of spatial settings and local arrangements and about these items’ presumed roles in generating moods or atmospheres.

¹⁸ See Grossberg (1992, ch. 1) for a valuable elaboration of the relevant understanding of “articulation” as a methodology for cultural studies.

What all these empirical endeavors have in common is that they do not have to assume the full notion of an ‘affective arrangement’, with all its contributing factors in play, but might highlight selected dimensions, or focus on different elements of an arrangement sequentially during the research process. Accordingly, reckoning with an affective arrangement within empirical research can take the form of an orientating blueprint which might be coarse-grained and selective initially, with details being filled in as new data emerges. The research process can take the form of a back and forth between provisional arrangement sketches and their correction and elaboration in the light of new material.

The best case scenario for the interdisciplinary study of affect is that the concept of an affective arrangement keeps these two distinct methodological tracks in resonance with one another. Theoretical diagnosis of complex affective arrangements will be more potent when it stays informed by empirical research of the presumed arrangements and their various components and modes of composition. Empirical work, in turn, will be less prone to reductionism or simplification when it keeps reckoning with complex and oftentimes unique constellations that may exceed whatever can be established by empirical methods – and sometimes also that which “makes sense” in conventional ways. With ‘affective arrangement’ we have a complex working concept that has a foot each within the qualitative and the quantitative, without being split up artificially. We hope that it will be put to use productively in future research on affect and emotion.

Acknowledgements

We have greatly benefitted from a number of critical readers of earlier drafts, among them Jule Govrin, Philipp Haueis, Antje Kahl, Imke von Maur, Christian von Scheve, Jorinde Schulz and Yasemin Ural. Likewise, we thank the audiences of several working meetings and colloquium sessions in the Collaborative Research Center 1171 *Affective Societies* at Freie Universität Berlin.

Funding Acknowledgement

Our work on this paper was part of the research activities of subproject B05 of the Collaborative Research Center 1171 *Affective Societies* at Freie Universität Berlin, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) from 2015-2019.

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