

Affective Arrangements and Disclosive Postures: Towards a Post-Phenomenology of Situated Affectivity

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Abstract.

In this paper, I explore links between the phenomenology-inspired philosophy of emotion, especially discussions of affective intentionality and situated affectivity, and those strands of work in the field cultural *affect studies* that take their inspiration from Spinoza and Deleuze. As bridges between these fields I propose the concepts ‘disclosive posture’ and ‘affective arrangement’. ‘Disclosive posture’ condenses insights from phenomenological work on affectivity, especially those pertaining to what Heidegger calls *Befindlichkeit*. ‘Affective arrangement’ is a descendant of Deleuze and Guattari’s term *agencement*. It refers to heterogeneous ensembles of elements coalescing into a sphere of heightened affective intensity in a local setting. I develop this notion into a tool for analyzing situated affectivity. As it does not yet figure prominently within debates in the philosophy of emotion, I will outline what is meant by ‘affective arrangement’ in some detail. Throughout, I discuss a productive tension between these two conceptual strands.

Keywords: affect, emotion, disclosive posture, affective arrangement, post-phenomenology, situatedness

1. Introduction: Towards a Post-Phenomenology of Situated Affectivity

Roughly, one might discern three key issues that phenomenology-inspired philosophy of emotion grapples with. First, it undertakes to explicate the way that emotions and other affective compartments relate to the world. How is what someone feels informative about – or disclosive of – what goes on in the world? Affective intentionality is the label for this.¹ Second, it aims to understand how affectivity is both, a dimension of *individual* experience and yet something that pertains to social collectives and environmental constellations. Affect is *individual* or subjective in a pronounced way yet at the same time something that is tangibly ‘out there’ in the world – in form of atmospheres or collective moods, for instance. Situated affectivity has come to be the label for this.² Third, much work in the phenomenology of emotion is concerned with coming to terms with the embodied character of affectivity. Here, the question is how emotional experience is, while indeed world-disclosing and socially situated, yet essentially a matter of the lived body, or rather of multiple such bodies in mutual attunement.³ Intentionality, situatedness, embodiment – it is around these themes that much work in contemporary phenomenology of emotion has so far revolved.

¹ See, e.g., Slaby & Stephan 2008.

² There has been a surge of philosophical work recently on situated affectivity. Affects and emotions are less and less considered as organism-bound processes or individual mental states. Recent studies explore various dimensions of affect’s situatedness – at times, even ‘extendedness’ – and their conceptual viability. I cannot survey this literature here, but my considerations pertain directly to this current of work. See, e.g., Griffiths & Scarantino 2009; Colombetti & Krueger 2015, Krueger 2014a; Krueger & Szanto 2016; Slaby 2014 & 2016a, Stephan et al. 2014.

³ See, e.g. Colombetti 2014, Fuchs & Koch 2014, Ratcliffe 2008.

In this paper, I approach these issues through a new lens. My proposal does not begin with individual affective experience, neither does it take the experiential perspective, bodily comportment or existential orientation of *individual subjects* as its starting point. Instead, the concept of an ‘affective arrangement’ presents a way to approach affectivity from a vantage point of local constellations of affective intensity. Here, affect comes in view as relational dynamics unfolding within a socio-material setting – in constellations in which subjects of experience are merely contributing elements among other elements, forming dynamic meshworks. With this orientation, the approach taken here has affinities with the post-humanist, material-culture-oriented and neo-vitalist perspective of cultural *affect studies* in the Spinoza-Deleuze trajectory (Gregg & Seigworth 2010, Massumi 2002). In this theoretical lineage, ‘affect’ does not refer to felt states of individuals, but to relations of affecting and being affected among human and non-human entities in a dynamic constellation. Inspired by Spinoza’s substance monism and ontological understanding of *affectus*/affectations (cf. Leo 2016), scholars working in this tradition take affect to belong to a pre-individual sphere of becoming, a realm prior to the consolidation of circumscribed entities, including human subjects. Affective relations are seen as contributing to the formation and concretization of entities as well as to their subsequent transformation and potential dissolution.⁴

To get a handle on this perspective’s relationship to the autonomous subject of the enlightenment tradition, consider this passage by Donovan Schaefer:

Affects, [...], are forces that exceed the classical liberal thematics of self-sovereignty. *Liberalism* here refers to an intellectual lineage emerging out of Western modernity that places the *liber* – the free man, the singular, rational, autonomous, speaking agent – at the center of its understanding of culture, politics, reason, knowledge and religion. The *liber* is auto-nomous – both self-lawed and self-sovereign – and therefore is the node (either the origin or the target) of systems of power. Affect complicates this picture. Berlant calls affect “sensual matter that is elsewhere to sovereign consciousness but that has historical significance in domains of subjectivity” [Berlant 2012, 53].” (Schaefer 2015, 23/4)

Yet, as Lauren Berlant hints at in this quotation, an important aim of work in affect studies is to *re-approach* ‘the subject’ and subjective experience within a dynamic-materialist framework, and with the assumption that materially situated affective dynamics play an important role in both the formation and the subsequent development and transformation of subjects and their individual perspectives and orientations. The experiential subject is no longer the main orienting principle, but it still figures as an important object of inquiry. The subject becomes a target of genealogical study and critical analysis. How do subjects of experience come about – and how do they get molded and transformed, framed and policed – within the meshworks of the socio-material arrangements that make up our contemporary lifeworlds? What concept of the subject, what ‘politics’ of subject-formation and what ethos of being a subject is to be adopted once the materiality, relationality, and transformative dynamics of affect are acknowledged? It is in this conciliatory spirit that I will attempt to combine two strands of ideas, one from affect-theory in the Spinoza-Deleuze lineage, centered on the notion of an ‘affective arrangement’, and one from a particular stage of the phenomenological tradition, namely, a recent elaboration of Heideggerian *Befindlichkeit* under the label of ‘disclosive postures’. As Katherine Withy (2015) has shown, one can understand Heidegger’s quasi-Aristotelian account of the passions in such a way that it aligns

⁴ The sociologist Robert Seyfert (2012) provides a lucid explication of the theoretical core of affect studies in this Spinoza-Deleuze trajectory. Lisa Blackman (2012) offers a detailed genealogical study of this line of work, including a discussion of affect studies’ sometimes conflict-ridden relation to mainstream emotion theory. Donovan Schaefer (2015) presents another condensed reconstruction of the field that also explores links to phenomenology. Earlier works of Sara Ahmed (2004; 2006) are a productive combination of phenomenology of emotion and cultural affect studies.

well with the idea of the situatedness of individuals within dynamic formations that are mostly opaque to reflective consciousness. Thus, the concept of a disclosive posture can help one theorize the individual's involvement with affective arrangements, potentially bringing the personal and the transpersonal (situated) dimensions of affectivity into alignment. Yet a tension between these different perspectives remains: in brief, it is a tension between an individualist and a non-individualist outlook. Among other things, this paper is an attempt to negotiate this tension, giving due weight to the contrasting intuitions that speak in favor of these *prima facie* distinct orientations.

If one wants a label for the broader approach taken in the following, one might speak of 'post-phenomenology'. The prefix 'post-' does not denote the surpassing of phenomenology but its transformation.⁵ Subjects of experience are approached as constitutively enmeshed in socio-material and socio-technical constellations; these constellations are the generative milieu of subject-formation. Accordingly, experience – as it may present itself to phenomenological analysis – is here understood to be pervaded by discursive, material, medial elements of various kinds and origins. These elements and processes often operate outside the conscious grasp – let alone reflective understanding – of individual subjects. The goal of post-phenomenological inquiry is not the laying bare of essential structures – be it of consciousness, of subjectivity or of sociality. Rather, the goal is to effect timely, purposeful interventions into dynamically changing, contested and politically consequential terrains – the formative milieus of contemporary life. Post-phenomenology has abandoned the assumption of one ultimate phenomenological 'structure' of reality. Instead, it adopts a historical and cultural sensibility for processes of becoming. Yet, post-phenomenology does adhere to the phenomenological directive: *to the things themselves*, in that it strives for concretion, specificity and detail in its case studies. It aims to give a voice to participants, human as well as non-human, in social practices and socio-material constellations.⁶

This is not the place to outline this methodological perspective in detail; so I merely mention three strands of work that contribute to the theoretical current I call post-phenomenology. First, notable are those lines of work in feminist and anti-racist phenomenology that have included genealogical, ethnographic and discourse analytical perspectives and have displayed a selective openness towards ideas from poststructuralism (Alcoff 1999, Lee 2014, Oksala 2016).⁷ Second, work in the philosophy of technology that focuses on the formative effects of systemic technologies and networked media within the lifeworld and with regard to its role in the constitution and transformation of human subjects. Here, 'post-phenomenology' has been adopted as a brand name by leading practitioners, and this is the most widely known employment of the term (e.g. Ihde 2009, Rosenberger &

⁵ "Whereas phenomenology was originally concerned with the philosophy of consciousness and the subject, postphenomenological approaches emphasize the anthropic confrontation with the world – and its cultural articulation – as a trans-subjective context of meaning in need of permanent elucidation and interrogation" (Adams 2007, 3).

⁶ An alternative to my label 'post-phenomenology' might be that of 'materialist phenomenology' as proposed by the scholar of religion Manuel Vásquez (2011) and further elaborated by Schaefer (2015).

⁷ I concur with Joanna Oksala's positioning of post-phenomenology. On the one hand, Oksala points to those strands in the writings of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty where the adherence to the first-person-perspective has already given way to openings towards historical, sociological, psychological and ethnographic perspectives. Yet at the same time she states in no unclear terms that a stronger alignment with genealogical, discourse analytical and political orientations is needed in order to avoid being stuck within a Eurocentric perspective. A central role thus accorded to the comparative "study of different systems of normality" which "function as a form of [phenomenological] reduction as it makes us aware of the hidden aspects of our own thought" (Oksala 2016, 106).

Verbeek 2015).⁸ Third, the label might be applied to work in cultural theory that combines a feminist orientation with transformative appropriations of phenomenology into a perspective that is politically engaged, activist and situated amidst ongoing social and political struggles (Ahmed 2006 & 2007).⁹

2. Disclosive Postures

I begin my considerations of situated affectivity from the side of individual affective comportment, by discussing Katherine Withy's helpful term 'disclosive posture' (Withy 2015). It is an excellent gloss of what affectivity, on part of subjects of experience, amounts to, if viewed from an advanced phenomenological key freed from subjectivist and mentalist baggage. The concept is geared to the zone of overlap between the situatedness of affect and the pronounced sense of potential *ownedness* that characterizes affectivity. To get her approach off the ground, Withy re-aligns Heidegger's analysis of *Befindlichkeit* with some of its source materials in Aristotle, concepts such as *pathé*, *hexis*, *diathesis*, *prohairesis*, among others. Here is how she explains her choice of term in relation to Heidegger and by way of distancing his approach from both cognitive and feeling theories of emotion:

Understanding the *pathé* in terms of judgments misses the same thing that understanding them as bodily feelings or conditions of the soul does – namely, that the *pathé* are ways in which we are out and about in the world, immersed and involved in our situation. To capture this, Heidegger needs a model other than that of a subject knowing an object. He uses the model of standing in a situation. On this model, the *pathé* are what I will call 'disclosive postures'. They are ways of finding ourselves situated, where this means both that they are ways of finding ourselves and our situation (i.e. that they are findingly disclosive) and that they are ways of being situated in the world (i.e. postures). This understanding of the *pathé* accommodates all intentional affective phenomena, including moods and emotions. (Withy 2015, 23)

What matters for present purposes is the comportment-type denoted by 'posture': standing in a situation, finding oneself situated, being "out and about" in the world, immersed in it – instead of experiencing or representing, let alone issuing a detached judgment on one's present surroundings. Our affectivity does not relate us to the world by way of mental representations or inner states of other kinds, but in the form of a wholesale *positioning* or *orientation* ('Ausrichtung') of our embodied being in relation to – alignment or misalignment – our current surroundings. The term posture refers to a person's 'stand' or 'stance', and it is clear from much of what Heidegger writes about findingness that this is to be understood as the various modes or ways of aligning with – being a part of and constellated into – a local arrangement of people and things.¹⁰

In view of this, it is no accident that Heidegger's favored term for episodes of affective comportment is 'Stimmung', which, taken literally, means alignment, arrangement or attunement. The history of the concept relates back to the practice of tuning a musical instrument. Only later did 'Stimmung' become the canonical German term for 'mood', with its connotations settling on notions of harmony in the sense of 'being in tune with' or

⁸ Besides drawing on a combination of phenomenology and American pragmatism, and aspiring to surpass the anti-technology stance of much earlier phenomenology, this camp aligns closely with empirical work from science and technology studies (STS). Its overall mission goes somewhat like this: "Postphenomenology is the practical study of the relations between humans and technologies, from which human subjectivities emerge, as well as meaningful worlds." (Rosenberger & Verbeek 2015, 12).

⁹ I have discussed Ahmed's stance and positioning in detail elsewhere; in this case, the label 'post-phenomenology' is my attribution. See Slaby (2016b).

¹⁰ Following a suggestion by Haugeland (2013), Withy translates Heidegger's *Befindlichkeit* aptly as *findingness*.

‘properly sounding’, ‘well-ordered’ (cf. Wellbery 2003). In Heidegger’s adoption, however, Stimmung and Befindlichkeit are no longer wedded to an idea of conventional harmony or harmonious coordination. Instead, these terms describe the dimension of a person’s being variously in- or out of tune with their surroundings – thus explicitly including states of disarray (‘Verstimmung’). This is the first idea to adopt from Heidegger and Withy: affectedness as *being situated* and thereby *oriented or disoriented* in an ambience.

What about the second term of the composite ‘disclosive posture’ – *disclosure*? This is Heidegger’s term of art for Dasein’s openness to the world: the dimension in which understanding or misunderstanding, awareness or unawareness are so much as possible. Part of the point of this choice of term is that ‘disclosure’ encompasses more than merely cognitive access, knowledge, or belief. Disclosure names the entire dimension of a person’s *potential* openness to the world, including the openness to what is in fact occluded, and also the openness to what is ‘there’ but nevertheless beyond one’s grasp. It is important to note that the concept of disclosure has to be understood normatively. ‘Being disclosed’, or existing, does not mean one is in fact aware of or in the know about everything, but that one is *capable* and – Heidegger thinks – under the normative obligation to become knowledgeable about oneself and one’s situation. Dasein, although in fact beset by swathes of confusion, error, and notoriously prone to diversions of all sorts, is nevertheless *required* to disclose properly – as for instance revealed in the state of angst, or relatedly in the call of conscience.¹¹

Applied to affectivity, this means that affective comportment is one’s *being constellated in* and *attuned to* the world in such a way that is *potentially* aware and knowledgeable, yet for the most part falling short of a lucid awareness of what is up with one. This potential closed-off-ness enabled by disclosure does not only pertain to the ways in which averageness or idle talk cloud one’s senses. It applies to the general condition that we’re at all times ‘thrown’ into constellations that we cannot oversee, grasp and understand. There is always more going on with and around us than we can get a handle on. The normative demand to become self-aware, to achieve an understanding stance on one’s situation, is an infinite task, something that one can at best aspire to and strive for, yet never realize in full. Our disclosive *reach* inevitably exceeds our manifest *grasp*; nonetheless, as persons we operate under a normative demand to get clear, and ever *more clear* on our situation.¹² Yet, the impossibility of fully living up to this obligation does not let us off the hook; on the contrary: We have to deal with the fact that we are situated in a world that does not end at the margins of our immediate awareness, our surroundings are not fenced like an enclosure. Heidegger’s term disclosure is meant to capture this ‘always more’ of situatedness and this ‘always less’ of understanding. With regard to mundane instances of affectivity, this means that we are *always* affectively attuned to and constellated into what we do not fully grasp. We are ‘thrown’ and affected by more than we can process, in ways we do not fully oversee, no matter how much of a de facto command of our situation we might have managed to achieve in a given case.

Of course, putting it this way already foregrounds those episodes of affectivity where we *do* have reached a half-way composed orientation – in Aristotle’s terms: *hexeis* as opposed to full-blown *pathé* (which will throw us into disarray, have us lose composure so that a

¹¹ The source of this normativity is not discussed by Withy as she presupposes the context of Aristotle’s inquiry into human excellence in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. For Aristotle, it is obvious and beyond debate that human individuals are subject to normative assessment in light of communal standards. Heidegger has a more complicated relationship to normativity, but one is well-advised to interpret central concepts from *Being and Time*, such as disclosure, authenticity and resoluteness, in normative terms: Dasein is not intelligible other than as committed to certain ‘constitutive standards’ (see Haugeland 2013).

¹² I have adopted this formulation from Rouse (2002, 25), who applies it to the normativity of human situatedness more generally: “Our normative reach always exceeds our grasp, and hence what is at stake in practices outruns any present articulation of those stakes.”

posture needs to be regained).¹³ But this is less relevant for present purposes. What matters is that Withy's take on Heidegger's findingness moves us right into the thicket of the situatedness of affectivity; in fact, on this reading, affectivity itself *is* the situatedness of finite, sense-making beings within encompassing worldly constellations. Experiencing an emotion *means* to be constellated into an ongoing situation that matters – an affective arrangement, or rather many of them – that are open to us yet outrun our understanding and practical grasp. With this we have reached a point where the phenomenological perspective on affect opens out to encompass the wider ambient, the situatedness of affect, while holding on to a robust sense in which the individual agent is the responsible addressee of normative demands: *get clear on what goes on, take your stand responsibly, but understand that this is an infinite, never-to-be-completed task.*

3. Affective Arrangements

In this section, I outline the working concept of an 'affective arrangement'. While disclosive postures are in the dimension of individual affective comportment, 'affective arrangement' applies to the 'other side' in the world-relatedness of affect: formations in the environment that trigger, channel and modulate affect, thereby bringing various individuals into a dynamic conjunction. Insofar as individual affective comportment can be glossed as ways of being "out and about in the world" (Withy 2015, 23), affective arrangements are among the domains and settings *within which* individuals find themselves immersed when in a passionate condition.¹⁴ I begin by revisiting the main source of inspiration behind my choice of the term 'arrangement' – the concept of an *agencement* in the works of Deleuze and Guattari. I then provide a general characterization of the gist of the concept of affective arrangement, before I discuss an example so as to be able to illustrate the focal dimensions of the concept in a concrete case. The section concludes with a discussion of three angles of analysis that might guide the empirical investigation of affect-rich social domains.

Lines of origin: agencement, complex, assemblage, machine

In Deleuze's and Guattari's works, the concept *agencement* has no uniform appearance. Rather, 'agencement' and its various cognates carve out a conceptual field and evolving conceptual lineage, with multiple origins and also branching out into different directions. Accordingly, there is no single, fits-all characterization of the concept. Still, there is a certain logic to the conceptual tangle that sets it apart from related notions, for example from the concept of assemblage in actor/network theory (cf. Buchanan 2015; Nail 2017). Likewise, one can trace various genealogical and conceptual strands that present an informative pre-history of the notion (cf. Schmidgen 1997). One important line of origin that cannot be explored here is the intersection between French vitalism and the philosophy of technology, a strand of work represented by authors such as Canguilhem, Leroi-Gourhan and Simondon (cf. Bardin 2015). A parallel line developing from this vitalist strand that aligns in some respects with 'agencement' is Foucault's concept of *dispositif* (Foucault 1995 [1975]; see Deleuze 1988). A notable direct forerunner of the 'agencement' is Freud's concept of complex (as in 'oedipal complex'). Rendered as 'agencement', the Freudian complex is de-individualized, partly de-psychologized and also freed of the psychoanalytic orientation towards familial constellations (cf. Deleuze & Guattari 1983 [1972]). Yet Deleuze's and Guattari's *agencement* retains some

¹³ Withy distinguishes three 'formats' of the passions in Heidegger and Aristotle, namely specific *capacity*, *instance* of affectedness and *posture* or 'hexis': "Affectivity can be as a capacity to be affected, as an actual pathos, or as a hexis (having)" (Withy 2015, 22).

¹⁴ Withy comes close to making the same point in her paper: "The *pathé* are particular (affective) arrangements of the world and us, in relation to one another" (Withy 2015, 23).

aspects of the Freudian complex – for example its potential idiosyncrasy or ‘crankyness’, its capacity to integrate or attach to all sorts of novel elements, and there are also still some elements of mentalism in at least some employments of ‘agencement’. An individual’s comportment, characteristic demeanor, bodily-affective style and habitual appearance can be considered to be an *agencement* of sorts. Here, similarities to the concept of disclosive posture are evident, as the *agencement*, if individualized into a habitual complex, is itself an embodied orientation, a characteristic pattern of routinized comportment unique to an individual in their homely domain (or, *mutatis mutandis*, to a close-knit couple or in-group). Types of bodily comportment, skills and routines figure centrally in this. Yet, at the same time, ‘agencement’ applies to social formations which also display the crankiness of Freudian complexes. So ‘agencement’ finds application on both sides of the shifting zone of overlap or ‘phase transition’ between individuals and their socio-material surroundings. This is a key reason why this conceptual tableau is of such interest to the situated affectivity debate, and why a rapprochement with the phenomenological understanding of *Befindlichkeit* is a promising undertaking.

The term ‘assemblage’ is by now common in social theory; it marks the theoretical afterlife of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept (cf. Latour 2005; DeLanda 2006). Assemblage was originally proposed as an translation into English of *agencement*, which was an odd choice as it is just a *different* French term instead of a fitting English counterpart such as ‘arrangement’. Since then, ‘assemblage’ has come to take on a meaning rather removed from what Deleuze and Guattari were grappling with. In actor-network theory (ANT) and other associationist approaches to social theory, the term ‘assemblage’ refers to a formation or alliance of elements coalescing into a local unity (Latour 2005).¹⁵ An *agencement*, on the other hand, does not glue its components into a conventional unity, it does not homogenize its elements.¹⁶ Instead, in an arrangement, the elements keep their self-standing character even while being dynamically linked. While the assemblage, as understood by proponents of ANT, homogenizes its elements into a more or less organic whole, the ‘unity’ of the *agencement* is fragmentary – it is a clustering of items that, in a sense, do not ‘fit the mold’. Deleuze and Guattari at one point speak of it as a “dry-stone wall” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 23). No one unifying principle, nor a homogeneous functionality governs it.¹⁷ Accordingly, arrangements might be somewhat deranged, dispersed, oddly composed; they are multiplicities, fragmentary wholes instead of cohesive wholes such as biological organisms.

In light of this, it is no accident – but marks an important conceptual decision – that Deleuze and Guattari often speak of ‘machines’ or ‘*agencements machiniques*’. What this term suggests is that the components of an arrangement are self-standing entities that are not organically but, at best, mechanically integrated – so as to function according to some potentially unique and idiosyncratic mode of operation. In addition, the concept of machine enrolls the *agencement* within the domain of technology and socio-technical arrangements, especially with civilization-defining technological complexes such as industrial or war machines (Deleuze and Guattari 1987 [1980], ch. 12).¹⁸ Yet, the invocation of ‘mechanism’

¹⁵ Yet, various authors in the domain of affect studies have adopted to the canonical English translation and keep writing ‘assemblage’ where what they intend to denote is what should be better translated as ‘arrangement’ (or kept in the original French as *agencement*). Some authors also contrast ‘assemblage’ with the ‘actor-network’ of ANT. A valuable overview from the perspective of human geography – where assemblage-thinking is most widespread today – is provided by Martin Müller (2015).

¹⁶ See Bonta & Protevi 2004, p. 54 for a concise glossary-style explication of ‘agencement’.

¹⁷ Some theorists speak of a “non-totalizable sum” (e.g. Bennett 2010, 24).

¹⁸ Thus, there is a clear sense in which *agencements machinique* are meant to evoke the theme of Cyborgian man-machine hybrids in both real and imaginary registers. Anthropotechnical hybridization is not dismissed by Deleuze and Guattari – as in many phenomenological critiques of technology – but welcomed as a resource of creative development and transformation of subjectivity (a theme particularly prominent in Guattari’s later writings; see, e.g., Guattari 1995).

can mislead, as the point is not that an *agencement* is in a conventional sense well-functioning (like the proverbial ‘well-oiled’ machine), rather: “what is crucial is that these machines do not work” (Buchanan 2015, 384).

I do not intend to model the concept of an affective arrangement strictly in accord with the Deleuze-Guattarian notion of *agencement*. Not all the details of their approach matter, neither all of the metaphysical backstory that these authors put forward. What does matter is that Deleuze and Guattari’s groundwork can be used to cobble together a conceptual tool – a ‘cranky arrangement’ in its own right – apt for theorizing situated affectivity in socio-technical settings in a way neither individualistic nor reductively mentalist, and so as to allow for case-specific elaboration. In phenomenological parlance, this employment of ‘affective arrangement’ works in the manner of ‘formal indication’ (cf. Heidegger GA 29/30, § 70). That is, it is a generic concept that helps render portions of reality intelligible, thereby situating the theorist amidst these realities, but it does not commit one to a worked out theoretical position nor to a specific theoretical lineage or paradigm to the strict exclusion of other approaches. Relatedly, the concept does not work in an explicative way, but more like a generative principle that is capable of guiding analyses of instances of situated affectivity. Command of the concept will result in a characteristic ‘optic’, an attuned sensibility and capacity for judgment, so that certain aspects of an object domain will be brought in view and rendered salient for subsequent elaboration.

Affective arrangement – explication and example

With this background and methodological orientation in place, we are in a position to attempt a characterization of affective arrangements.

Affective arrangements are local ensembles of heterogeneous elements that form a characteristic layout marked off from its surroundings by thresholds of intensity. Candidate elements include humans and non-humans, i.e. spaces, artifacts, technology, but also symbols, utterances, or other expressive materials. Human actors are part of constellation from the outset – it is only in conjunction with humans that non-human elements coalesce into an affective arrangement. The same goes for affectivity. There is not *first* a constellation of elements that is *then* enlivened by affective dynamics unfolding in it. Rather, affect – in the form of a tangle of affective relations – is the vital core of an affective arrangement, it is what dynamically links its elements and demarcates it from the surrounding ambient. Thus, an affective arrangement is always in operation, it is always ‘on’ – one might apply to it the Greek term ‘*energeia*’, as it is an *actualization* of a potential (‘*dynamis*’). It is the ongoing, ‘live’ affective relations among the elements that constitutes zones of higher relative intensity compared to what is outside. Thus, affect neither comes before nor after the other elements but inheres in the entirety of the overall formation. Accordingly, one might say that this concept pertains primarily to the *event* of a simultaneous affecting and being affected in a setting. Yet, the point of the concept is to make salient a specifically organized layout of contributory elements that *enable* such events to unfold in the way they do (cf. Nail 2017).¹⁹

As a somewhat pedestrian yet informative example, consider a party. Adequately disposed people gather in a suitable location, there is music, food and drink, decoration and so on – it all comes together into a tangle of characteristic affective interactions – myriads of micro-engagements between people, overt and covert, and also between interacting people and the material layout of the space. These all condense into the party’s specific affective atmosphere, a characteristic overall ‘feel’ or impression, yet not in the form of one homogeneous affective tone but as more of a discontinuous interweaving of different zones of

¹⁹ Seyfert (2012) and Anderson (2014, ch. 2) have proposed concepts similar to what I call *affective arrangement*, and both align it with Foucault’s notion of a *dispositif*: Seyfert speaks of ‘the affectif’ while Anderson chooses the term ‘apparatus’, the standard English translation of *dispositif*.

affective intensity.²⁰ Considered globally, there will be a notable division between inside and outside, superficially marked by spatial boundaries of the location, but in fact circumscribed by thresholds of intensity. So when new guests arrive, if only half-way adequately disposed, they will likely be swayed into the affective fray rather quickly. But also someone *not* willing – or able – to succumb to the frenzy will at least sense the notably higher level of affective intensity at the party as compared with its outside. On the other hand, the party might of course float across its spatial boundaries into a wider ambient, as when a cloud of smokers flocks onto the street, or when the entire crowd decides to move to another location.²¹

The example of a party is illustrative also for further reasons. Taken as a whole, the party is not one homogeneous entity, but an aggregate of different sub-spheres.²² So it is not unusual that guests will come away from one and the same party with rather different experiences. A party offers different trajectories of potential engagement – and that is generally true of affective arrangements. Thus, ‘affective arrangement’ is not just another way of speaking of collective emotions or moods, in the sense of a single homogeneous emotional experience shared among a number of individuals. The concept of an affective arrangement is specifically geared to capturing a ‘distinctness in unity’ among those co-present in a situation. In affective arrangements, different slots for individual involvement exist in an overall constellation that nevertheless displays a unity of sorts, as the formation is marked off from its surroundings by thresholds of intensity.

The same point might be stated from the point of view of the participant individuals. Unless they adhere to a very formal code, parties usually allow their participants quite a bit of leeway in how to behave, how look, how to engage (or not) with other guests, etc. Most parties do not impose a strict regime on the partygoers, but allow for all sorts of stylistic extravagances, and for a considerable range of expression, behavior and emotion. This is another important feature of affective arrangements: they do not homogenize or ‘normalize’ their elements but rather integrate them in ways that leave their individuality mostly intact.²³ In fact, this is a big part of why affective arrangements are so effective as means for governing individuals without their notice: Affective arrangements work less through imposing disciplinary pressures (although they might do that too), but more so that they connect, integrate and activate – often even the outliers, those that won’t conventionally ‘fit

²⁰ I cannot provide an explication of ‘intensity’ here, a concept that has been prominent in affect studies thanks to the work of Brian Massumi (1995; 2002, cf. also Seyfert 2018). In microsociology, Randall Collins has proposed the Durkheim-inspired concept of ‘emotional energy’ in a comparable theoretical role (Collins 2004). Genealogically, these strands are linked as they both point back to psychological and sociological work of the phase between 1880 and 1910, where authors such as Tarde, Bergson, James and Freud figure prominently, see Blackman (2012) for historical elucidation.

²¹ The invocation of the concept ‘atmosphere’ is understandable in describing affective arrangements, and it does get at something substantive, yet the danger is that this concept lets one assume a homogeneous overall affective formation instead of a local tangle of potentially distinct, even conflicting, misaligning or dispersed affective relations. Thus one might say that wherever the concept of ‘affective atmosphere’ correctly applies, there is an affective arrangement, but the reverse does not hold, as there might be affective arrangements that are too heterogeneous and fragmented for the concept of ‘atmosphere’ to apply. At best, one might here speak of different atmospheric zones or currents, but is it doubtful that such metaphoric speech is of much use.

²² Jane Bennett speaks of assemblages (her term for what I call ‘arrangements’) as having “uneven topographies, because some of the points at which the various affects and bodies cross paths are more heavily trafficked than others, and so power is not distributed equally across its surface” (Bennett 2010, 24). Bennett’s construal is helpful also because she focuses particularly on the distributed agency that comes to pass in an arrangement (cf. *ibid.*), yet in all her approach remains somewhat too much within the ambit of Latourian ANT to be fully adaptable to my understanding of affective arrangements.

²³ This is not to say that affective arrangement might not also effect exclusions. To the contrary: while integrating a broad range of participants, other types and styles might be all the more vigorously excluded. Exclusions likewise work in different, sometimes subtle ways, via various affective markers and affective interaction patterns. Ahmed (2006; 2012) discusses several examples of affective exclusions, especially in institutional contexts.

in'. In this respect, certain affective arrangements have a counter-cultural openness about them that might be welcomed because of its creative potentials, yet is quite ambivalent from a political vantage point. Potentially liberating, and permissive as to who and what fits in, affective arrangements are yet such that forms of coercion or the extraction of labor, energy or creativity unfold all the more effectively through them, more seamless, encountering less resistance, often being not even noticed by those in their sway (cf. Slaby 2016a).

In contrast with most parties, many other affective arrangements are on the whole less intense, and thus probably less easily discernible as specifically *affective* arrangements. Yet, a different level of affective intensity will nevertheless prevail within these constellations as compared with their immediate outside. Consider what happens in a classroom, in a corporate office, in cafés and restaurants, but also in the family dining room, not to mention in venues of entertainment, sports sites or shopping malls – all zones of relatively higher intensity, higher density of affective relatedness, higher emotional energy. The point of the concept is in each case to understand local tangles of affective relations as specifically enabled and orchestrated by a constellation of distinct elements. Accordingly, these contributory elements, their modes of composition and also the slots for individual involvement in the constellation might be analyzed both separately and in their concrete conjunction. It is to these three distinct yet interrelated angles of analysis that I now turn.

Three analytic angles

Thomas Nail has abstracted three basic dimensions that organize the agencement. In his terms, any given arrangement possesses *conditions*, *elements* and *agencies*. Deleuze and Guattari speak of these dimensions as abstract machine, concrete machine and personae. Under the first rubric, Nail subsumes “the network of specific external relations that holds the elements together” (2017, 24). One might be tempted to speak here of the arrangement’s operational schema – but that would suggest more in the way of deliberate, planned organization than many real-life cases of affective arrangements in fact display.²⁴ In view of this, the term ‘abstract machine’ is well chosen. What is meant is not a blueprint, principle or ‘idea’ that is only *subsequently* implemented in a specific arrangement, but the relational constellation itself that is always already ‘live’ in an arrangement. One might for instance think of the ‘panopticon’ as a paradigm for surveillance as conceived by Bentham and later turned into a textbook case of a ‘dispositif of power’ by Foucault (Foucault 1995 [1975]).²⁵ Another example with contemporary relevance is the idea of the team or ‘teamwork’ (see, e.g., Gregg 2011; Mühlhoff & Slaby 2018). The ‘team’ figures as the abstract relational schema that is differentially manifest – *hic et nunc* – in various organizations and workplace arrangements. It does not materially ‘exist’ separately from its realization in these concrete settings. However, theorists might of course *analyze* social life in terms of abstract machines, i.e. with regard to operative schemas of social organization and how these evolve or mutate over time.

In turn, it is the various and variable *elements* out of which the differential manifestations of the abstract machine are composed that make up the ‘concrete machine’. While the abstract machine refers to the relations, the concrete machine names the elements. As relations and elements are co-dependent in an arrangement, it is clear that there is no

²⁴ Of course, part of the rationale behind the concept of affective arrangement is to enable a minute analysis of instances of deliberate affect design in certain domains of social life, but the concept itself *also* applies to formations where no deliberate organization has taken place. Also, when deliberate organization happens it is often a process of adjusting or fine-tuning an existing arrangement instead of setting up a new one from scratch.

²⁵ Anderson (2014, 31-37) points out that Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* discussed public arrangements that resemble what this paper calls affective arrangements and what Anderson calls ‘apparatuses’, for instance public spectacles of punishment or torture. The Foucauldian resonances of the concept affective arrangement are explored in detail in Mühlhoff & Slaby (2018).

‘ontic’ difference between abstract and concrete; every change on the level of the elements manifests in corresponding changes in the relational configuration:

Since the abstract machine is not an eternal essence or a program given in advance of the concrete elements, when the concrete elements change so does the set of relations they are in. There is thus a reciprocal determination between the abstract and the concrete: when one changes, so does the other. (Nail 2017, 26)

The third element – personae or agencies – can likewise be adopted for the construal of specifically *affective* arrangements. With personae, an element of ‘vital insistence’ is introduced into an *agencement* – not yet real persons, but active instances, sometimes person-like, that enliven the arrangement by enacting its operations. Tentatively, one might speak here of ‘roles’ or ‘subject positions’ that an arrangement both enables and depends on. Without such actors, the arrangement would collapse into a heap of mere stuff; on the other hand, without such arrangements (or *agencements* in general), there would be no viable ways for individual actors ‘to be’. In terms of theory architecture, this resembles Heidegger’s account of the everydayness of Dasein in *Being and Time*. The formal similarity lies in the fact that social domains present ‘roles’ that are occupied by individuals in routine and unreflective ways. According to this perspective, people are for the most part not authentic, self-possessed individuals but almost ‘ghost-like’ functionaries of social mechanisms (*das Man*). Thanks to the arrangements that make up social life, everyday human being unfolds for the most part routinely, within the subject positions that social domains hold at the ready. These roles pre-exist their individual occupants in each case, yet exist only insofar as there are specifically constellated individuals at all that interact in such recurring ways (cf. Heidegger 1962 [1927], § 27).

Affective arrangements intensify this dimension of default sociality on a micro-relational level. This concept suggests that ‘what is felt’ is likewise outsourced into recurring constellations of affective relatedness that pre-exist each single individual. Such pre-formatted affective relations might be response patterns within socio-technical arrangements, for instance in human-machine interaction (cf. Seyfert 2018). On another level, we find *affective roles* besides more formal ‘social roles’, for example roles such ‘class comedian’, ‘grumpy critic’, ‘giggling teenager’, ‘aficionado’. Or consider again the ‘teams’ of teamwork arrangements: these teams will likely include a ‘clown’, an ‘energetic leader’, an ‘empathetic listener’, an ‘everybody’s darling’ type, and so on. Affectivity unfolds within the lines and paths laid down in chains of previous interactions within affective arrangements.²⁶

In the study of instances of situated affectivity, these three dimensions – conditions, elements, roles – can inform three different yet related angles of analysis. One might inquire into the particular material arrangements and how these give rise to a characteristic pattern of affective relatedness in a setting. For instance, one might analyze the spatial, equipmental, technological, or medial layout of a given locale – such as a corporate workplace – to reveal the ways in which relational affectivity unfolds concretely therein. One might then transpose the perspective to the abstract and assess the overall relational configuration that is discernible in the setting at hand, and thematize it from a historical perspective or in a culturally comparative perspective (e.g., ‘attachment type’ in child rearing, styles of art, schemas of work organization, educational programs, etc.). Likewise, one might shift attention to the personae or subject positions within an affective arrangement – all those ‘vital functions’ the arrangement requires to be fulfilled in order to be able to operate; functions that the arrangement will in turn sustain, perpetuate and elaborate. In view of these arrangement-

²⁶ Limited space precludes exploring the parallels between the present account and the approach of sociologist Erving Goffman. Several of the concepts he employs in his interactionist approach resonate with the perspective sketched here, see, e.g., Goffman (1977).

specific ‘slots’ for individual engagement, different modes of affective involvement and habituation enabled by an arrangement can be analytically assessed.

All three vantage points – abstract schema, concrete arrangement, subject positions – offer valuable perspectives for studying situated affectivity in a way that is neither restricted to individual feelings nor to categorically codified emotion types. Instead, affective arrangements present the possibility to study distributed affectivity and agency as part of socio-material formations, and to adopt an outside-in perspective on individual affective and emotional repertoires. This also opens up an angle for critique of framing effects, power relations, processes of nudging and seamless coercion effected through the operation of affective arrangements (cf. Slaby 2016a; Mühlhoff & Slaby 2018). As should have been visible throughout, the approach outlined here does not take the affect theoretic road into completely impersonal territory, as some theorists following Spinoza and Deleuze have suggested (e.g., Bennett 2010, xii). Instead, I have tried to chart a middle ground between the posthumanism of the more radical affect-studies approaches and the humanism of phenomenology.

4. Outlook: A productive tension?

Yet still, there is a tension between the two parts of this paper. ‘Disclosive postures’ pertain to the comportment of individuals – individual actors that are under a normative obligation to disclose properly. This runs counter to the perspective on ‘affective arrangements’, where human agents come in view only as elements among other elements, formed and molded by larger, heterogeneous constellations. According to Withy, being capable of disclosive postures – ‘existing findingly’ – entails that one is *obliged* to strive for a stance of clarity and composed circumspection within constellations that matter yet outrun one’s command. Her focus thus lies with the comportment of agents that find themselves enmeshed in larger, partially opaque constellations, and – following Aristotle and Heidegger – she considers a normative perspective as inevitable.²⁷ While overcoming representationalism and internalist-mentalism, this is still within the ambit of a classical philosophy of the subject, as the world comes in view as ‘centered’ around a responsible individual. The farther Withy takes us into her Aristotelian perspective, the more her approach resembles a normative canon, a *meta-ethics* for a situated human existence.

One might find such an ethics useful as an addition to the Spinoza-Deleuze line of affect-theory and its radicalized constellationism. The more dispersed, heterogeneous and even chaotic the constellations are that make up the formative ambient of a person’s affectivity, the more might we see a need to account for an individual’s efforts – and responsibility – to achieve a coherent, reasonable stance amidst the surrounding frenzy. It can seem that well-calibrated ‘disclosive postures’ is exactly what a situated, relationally constituted, post-sovereign individual needs in order to achieve at least a semblance of autonomy. A limited, provisional and fragile composure amidst opaque and changing socio-material constellations is better than no accountable order whatsoever. Individual accountability is kept in the picture, instead of letting it all blow off into the whirlwinds of posthumanism.

Such an intermediate positioning between the extremes of ontological individualism and posthuman dissolution might seem welcome from the pragmatic vantage point of inquiry,

²⁷ Withy doesn’t quite put it this way herself as she adopts Heidegger’s strategy of *ontologizing* normative questions – as is evident in the following passage: “We can be blamed for not being owned for the same reason that for Aristotle we can be blamed for not being excellent: it is a way of failing to be what we are. This is not a moral failing but an ontological one” (Withy 2015, 31). Withy’s proneness to employing a generic “we” throughout her text also indicates her adherence to normative subject thinking.

and Withy provides conceptual tools to let us steer this course well. But it is not a stable resting place. If there is one central meta-philosophical message of the conceptual framework of the *agencement*, then it is the conviction that well-ordered units of sense, homogeneous domains of intelligibility, and coherent subjective perspectives can be had only on condition of forceful straightening, as a result of operations that *enforce* order on what was essentially unordered, plural and multiple, and thus on pain of violent exclusions. Outside the ambit of exclusionary or repressive power relations, there are no ordered ‘wholes’, no smoothly functioning arrangements, no unitary, stratified or conventionally organized subjects. Where things or subjects do appear well-ordered, something unruly will have been repressed, excluded or forcefully molded into form.²⁸ Under this assumption, the danger of Withy’s approach is that it stays complicit with a perspective that presupposes a hetero-constitution of the subject and a potentially repressive normative canon – a perspective that takes the question of what it means to be a responsible subject to be always already settled in the last instance.²⁹

Work on affect in the Spinoza-Deleuze tradition is better equipped to account for the unruliness, contingency and contestedness of all that is. Affect, as understood in this tradition of scholarship, is what registers rupture, conflict, the stirrings of all things blocked out. If freed from phantasies of harmony and well-ordered wholeness, work on affect sensitizes thought to dispersed complexes, heterogeneity and perpetual change. Affect keeps one’s theoretical sensibility on the edge, alert to rupture, disorder and transformative impulses, so that theorists will not rest content with articulations already achieved. The question of the subject and of a possible normative accountability of subjects of experience should be posed against this background. In a chaotic and conflict-ridden world lacking the certainties once provided by tradition, there can hardly be a firmer ground for philosophical inquiry.

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²⁸ One might call this the *Nietzschean legacy* of contemporary critical theories, represented to equal degrees but with different emphases by Foucault, Deleuze and Butler.

²⁹ I take it that this is how Heidegger himself saw the matter when he distanced himself from his account of Dasein in *Being and Time* and adopted a post-humanist outlook in his later works. Of course, already in the sections on *angst* or conscience in *Being and Time*, Heidegger displays a firm sense for the unruliness or disarray in Dasein, yet the orientation in that book is ultimately always in the direction of composed self-possession as a proper response to such disarray. I cannot do full justice to this complicated matter in the space of this concluding section.

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